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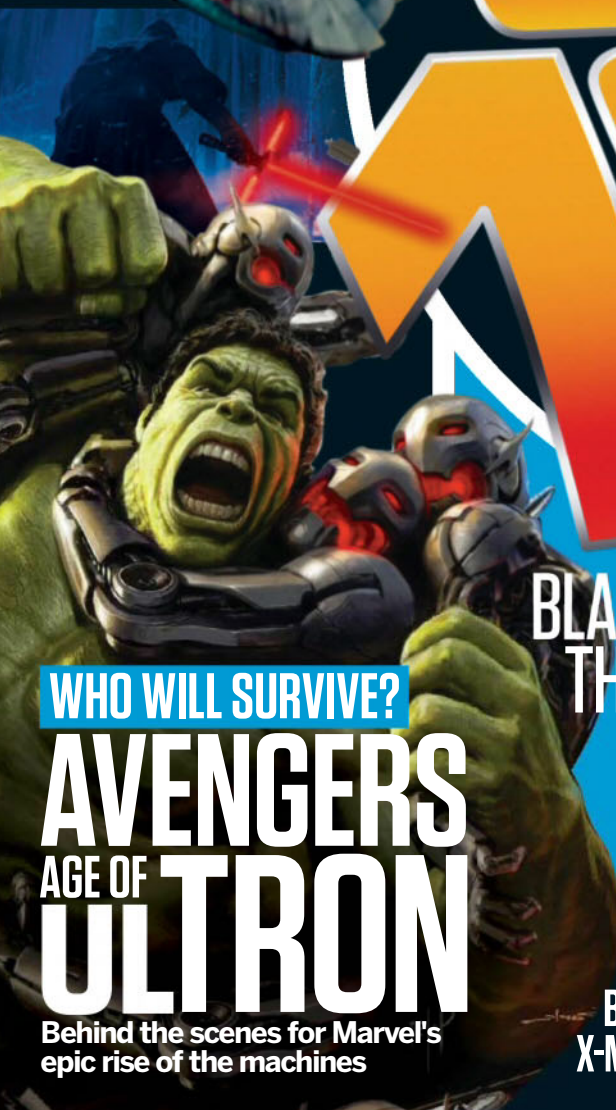
THE GEEK 100



DAWN OF JUSTICE

WONDER WOMAN

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ISSUE 101

HALO 5

G U A R D I A N S

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GET EXCITED ABOUT CHAPPIE

After his big-hearted, big-budget action sci-fi in *Elysium*, *District 9* wunderkind Neill Blomkamp is going back to his roots for the scrappy, punk-rock answer to *Short Circuit* – *Chappie* – which teams up *X-Men* beefcake Hugh Jackman with a mullet and esoteric South African rap duo Die Antwoord with a friendly robot. What's not to find absolutely alluring here?



Star Wars is one of those tricky things to quantify. You just know it when you see it, and wading through the books, comics, videogames, prequels and animated series has taught us that the magic *Star Wars* factor didn't always bless George Lucas, and it certainly didn't bless everything with that iconic neon-tube lighting logo.

There are bits of the *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* teaser that look too contemporary to fit the conservative view of how *Star Wars* should look, but they don't look wrong. So many classic

Star Wars memories are tied to those inimitable wipes and the earnest Hollywood staginess that gave the whole thing a touch of *Gone With The Wind* that it's tough to separate that nebulous Starswarsyness that stirs the heart from very real *Star Wars* cinematography that stirs the eyeballs.

Thinking, it turns out, is the problem. As a great teacher once said, "Your eyes can deceive you. Try again. Stretch out with your feelings."

If the prequel trilogy taught us anything, it's that Starswarsyness and *Star Wars* cinematography aren't interchangeable. From that tantalising

88-second teaser, it's suddenly crystal clear that JJ Abrams has dug deeper than style and set-dressing, red lightsabers and X-Wing starfighters. He's showing us adventure, wonder, danger and hope. He's giving us that primordial clash between good and evil, an everyman out of his depth and an everywoman with the steel to do the impossible.

Star Wars is back – real *Star Wars*, that is. Search your feelings, you will know it to be true.

James
James Hoare
Editor in Chief

CONTENTS

EVERY ISSUE

06 PORTAL

What's happening in the world of sci-fi

88 SUBSCRIPTIONS

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130 NEXT ISSUE

Your first look at the next issue of SciFiNow



36 BIG HERO 6

The creators of Disney's next mega-hit speak

INTERVIEWS



66 AGENT CARTER

One-on-one with Hayley Atwell

PREVIEW



60 BIRDMAN

Michael Keaton goes meta



50 DOCTOR WHO

On set with Nick Frost



77 MOCKINGJAY: PART 1



06 STAR WARS: EPISODE VII

The Force is strong...



56 EX MACHINA

Alex Garland on his cult hit



10 INTO THE WOODS

PORTAL

06 Star Wars: The Force Awakens

Your first look at quite possibly the most anticipated movie of all time.

08 Helix

The cast on why everything changes in the second season of Syfy's viral horror drama.

10 Into The Woods

Chris Pine, James Corden and Emily Blunt reveal what it was like on the star-studded stage show adaptation.

12 The Librarians

X-Men star Rebecca Romijn gives her thoughts on this update of the movie series.

FEATURES

17 The Geek 100

From *Jupiter Ascending* to *Justice League*, we pick the highlights of future geekdom.

36 Big Hero 6

As Disney's heroes blast off, the directors say why this is isn't your usual super-movie.

42 Batman: The Series

Celebrating 75 years of the Dark Knight with Adam West and Burt Ward, the original Dynamic Duo.

48 Batman: Weirdest Moments

From Bat-Mite to Bat-bomb, we browse the strangest moments in his history.

50 Doctor Who

We chat to Peter Capaldi and Nick Frost from the set of the latest Christmas special.

56 Ex-Machina

Writer Alex Garland gives us the lowdown on his cautionary tale about AI.

60 Birdman

The cast and crew reveal all on this Michael Keaton-starring superhero meta-drama.

66 Agent Carter

Hayley Atwell on living in a man's world in this show from the makers of *SHIELD*.

70 The Woman In Black: Angel Of Death

We head to the set of the sequel to Hammer's mega hit.

REVIEWS

76 Birdman

Does Alejandro Gonzalez's latest soar or plummet to Earth?

77 The Hunger Games: Mockingjay – Part 1

Katniss strikes back as the *Hunger Games* draw to an end.

77 The Woman In Black: Angel Of Death

Does this live up to the Daniel Radcliffe-starring original?

79 Big Hero 6

Will this be Disney's next *Frozen*? Read on to find out.

80 Hayao Miyazaki Collection

Spirited Away, *Howl's Moving Castle* and more are reviewed.



17 GEEK 100

From Avengers: Age Of Ultron to Jurassic World, here are the highlights of 2015 and beyond

81 The Green Mile

Does Frank Darabont's classic still hold up 15 miles on?

82 Stanley Kubrick: The Masterpiece Collection

We look back at *The Shining*, *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A Clockwork Orange* and more.

83 The Hobbit: The Desolation Of Smaug

Is the extended edition worth the wait? Find out here.

84 Doctor Who

How does Peter Capaldi get on in his first season as the Doctor?

84 The Strain

Our review of Guillermo del Toro's vampire series goes viral.

BOOK CLUB

92 Essential Read: Solaris

How sci-fi's lone wolf Stanislaw Lem struck out and created an enduring classic.

96 Revival

Discover what we thought of Stephen King's latest novel.

98 Descent

We stumble into a new dystopia in Ken MacLeod's latest.

102 Original Sin

Marvel's brightest gather to solve the mystery of who killed Uatu the Watcher.

104 Roy Thomas

The former Marvel editor in chief on stepping into the shoes of Stan Lee.

TIMEWARP

110 Saw

We go behind the scenes with the creators and cast of one of the most inventive horror series of all time.

118 The Nightmare Before Christmas

How Tim Burton created a classic in the form of this stop-motion masterpiece.

122 The Thing

John Carpenter on how he created a horror classic.

126 Elf

Do you know more about Christmas than Buddy?



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MEET THE TEAM

Q. Which film/TV show are you most looking forward to in 2015?



James Hoare
Editor in Chief

A. **Mad Max: Fury Road**
Super-stylised and super-cool, George Miller cranks it up.



Jonathan Hatfull
Senior Staff Writer

A. **Crimson Peak**
Del Toro returns to Gothic horror with an incredible cast.



Poppy-Jay Palmer
Staff Writer

A. **Agent Carter**
Judging by *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, it's going to be a doozy.



Steve Wright
Production Editor

A. **Star Wars: The Force Awakens**
The most anticipated film of all time?



Marcus Faint
Senior Designer

A. **Avengers 2**
Yeah, yeah, safe option, but my god that trailer got me excited!



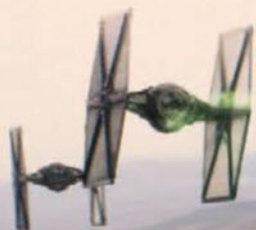
110 **TimeWarp**
The Complete **SAW** Guide

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PORTAL

Your essential,
trustworthy and
unrivalled guide
to the latest genre
happenings

NEWS



“THERE HAS BEEN
AN AWAKENING.
HAVE YOU FELT IT?”



The new lightsaber design provided
the source for much internet debate.

Could John Boyega
be the new lead?





Actor Harrison Gilbertson on the next big YA hit adaptation



The actor discusses his time on *The Princess Bride*



The first word on this low-budget Belgian horror

THE FANS AWAKEN

STAR WARS VII: YOUR FIRST LOOK

We break down the internet-shattering first trailer for *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*...

WORDS STEVE WRIGHT

Ever since news first broke out that the *Star Wars* film saga would live on after Lucasfilm's acquisition by Disney, Force fans the world over have been biding their time, waiting for their first glimpse of JJ Abrams' exciting new order. Now, with the release of the first footage from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, we finally have it, but did it live up to expectations? In a word: yes.

Having announced its arrival to the world on Friday 28 November via actor Andy Serkis uttering the words, "There has been an awakening. Have you felt it?" it's fair to say that if anticipation wasn't already at fever pitch, it is now, as millions of fans across the globe screamed a resounding "Yes!" in response. With first glimpses of new cast members John Boyega, Daisy Ridley and Oscar Isaac in costume, the new-look Stormtroopers and, of course, the Millennium bloody Falcon – all set to John Williams' trademark rousing score – it's fair to say that the Force is strong in this one.

The Force Awakens is still over a year away from release, but having taken its first steps into a wider world, we are sure that this will be the first of many little glimpses over 2015, and we can't wait. Here are our highlights...

Star Wars: The Force Awakens will be released in cinemas on 18 December 2015.

Daisy Ridley atop her hovercar/speeder-inspired vehicle.



STORMTROOPER SURPRISE

John Boyega wakes up with a start, clad in Stormtrooper attire and seemingly alone on a very Tatooine-looking desert planet. We hear the signal of the Imperial Probe Droid seen on Hoth in *The Empire Strikes Back*.



SUPER TROOPERS

It's hard to tell for sure thanks to all the flickering lights, but it definitely looks like the Stormtrooper armour has become more chrome-like in appearance, and their weaponry definitely more advanced.



RETURN OF THE SITH

A dark-hooded figure stumbles through a snowy forest, before said hooded figure ignites the Sith signature red-bladed lightsaber, complete with hilt. We're going to guess it's Adam Driver, rumoured to be the new big bad.



DROIDS OF FUTURE PAST

Still on probably Tatooine (as we're calling it), what looks like an advanced R2 unit – resembling a big metal beachball with a head – rolls along, jittering in alarm. But wait – is that a podracer we see in the background?



X-WINGS ASSEMBLE

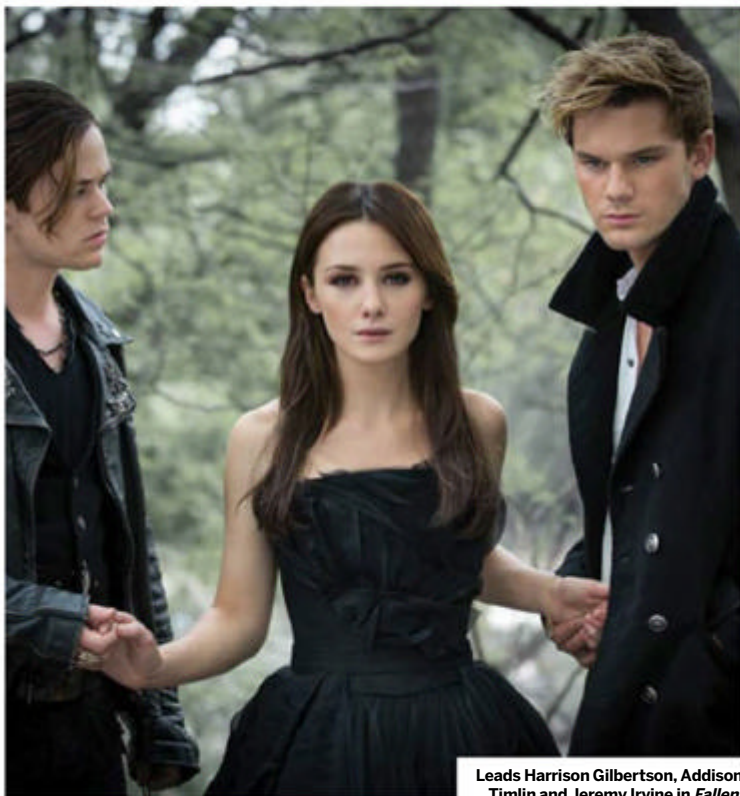
In another fan-gasm-bating moment, the Rebel Alliance's signature fighters appear – gliding along in battle formation above a lake. We also see the colours of the Blue Squadron on the side of the nearest X-Wing.



FLIGHT OF THE FALCON

Finally, something happens that makes everything else seem like appetisers. The Millennium Falcon roars into view, accompanied by that tingling John Williams score as the camera pans 180 degrees.

WINGS OF LOVE



Leads Harrison Gilbertson, Addison Timlin and Jeremy Irvine in *Fallen*.

FALLING FOR AN ANGEL

Actor Harrison Gilbertson reveals the heart at the centre of new YA movie *Fallen* WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

It's basically the classic triangular relationship arc," confirms Aussie co-lead Harrison Gilbertson (*Haunt*), who plays angel love interest Cam Briel in *Fallen*, the latest film from director Scott Hicks. "There's this girl Lucinda Price [played by *Odd Thomas*' Addison Timlin], who has these strange tendencies and sees these shadows all the time. At the beginning of the film a very bad accident happens, and as a result she goes to a reform school. At the school she notices these students are all quite different from other students, and she falls for two of them."

Since the Cullens hung up their fangs, and following the phenomenal success of *The Hunger Games*, there have been numerous attempts to kick-start other fantasy franchises based on a series of books that haven't exactly lifted the spirits. Stephenie Meyer extraterrestrial adaptation *The Host* was a disaster, and *Beautiful Creatures* didn't fare much better, and while 2015 will see sequels to both *Divergent* and *The Maze Runner*, it remains to be seen whether they can match the success of

Suzanne Collins' series. But perhaps Hicks (who received a 'Best Director' Oscar nomination for 1996's *Shine*) will fill the void with fantasy angel drama *Fallen* – an adaptation of the first in a series of gothic novels by Lauren Kate.

Rising star Jeremy Irvine (soon to be seen in *The Women In Black: Angel of Death*), plays alternate fallen angel Daniel Grigori, who is actually Lucinda's original true love when it is revealed that Lucinda has been reincarnated every 17 years since the fall from heaven in the battle of God and Lucifer.

Filming took place in Budapest, Hungary, and Gilbertson describes it as one of the most enjoyable times he's had while being on set. "It was a group of 20-somethings all hanging out in almost this commune-style hotel, and it was super fun!" he says. "Jeremy is really talented too, and he's probably the hardest young actor I've worked with. I'm really curious and excited to see the film and the response."

Fallen will be released in cinemas sometime in 2015.

HELIX FROM THE FLAMES

The cast and crew on embarking on pastures new for Season Two WORDS EDWARD GROSS

In its first season, Syfy's *Helix* dealt with an attempt to control the outbreak of the Narvik virus that threatened the world. But as things unfolded, it turned out that the members of the CDC were actually dealing with something much larger: immortals. Add to that revelation the destruction of the show's setting in a bio-research centre in the Arctic, and you've got a game-changing second season.

"One of the things we always talked about doing with the show was changing up the location," explains executive producer Steven Maeda. "The show is so self-contained, and obviously we blew everything up at the end of Season One, so we couldn't go back there."

The locale has been shifted to an island, which is both more expansive and claustrophobic in that the characters will more or less be trapped there. "I think we've maintained the sense of claustrophobia from the first season. Although we get to go out on location and run around in the woods, they're dark and scary."

Part of the chills will no doubt come from the immortals, particularly Kyra Zagorsky's Dr Julia Walker, whose life was turned upside down when she discovered what she really is.

"Last season, there was a lot that was taken from her," reflects Zagorsky, "and who she was at

the beginning of the season is completely different by the end. With immortality, it's this new way of having to start over. You get that chance to try to right a wrong, but then that's where the whole 'play God, pay the price' things starts to step in."

"The cool thing about immortality," says Maeda, "is it gives us the opportunity to bounce around, flashing backwards and forward in time so that it will take you to all sorts of different places."

An appealing aspect of Season Two for them is the fact that it will take place 15 months after the first season. "One of the reasons we did such a time jump," Maeda says, "is we wanted to start characters off in a really different place. Then you can watch and say, 'Wait, how did that happen? Just like we did with that jump to the Ilaria headquarters at the end of last season, and we wanted to do that with a number of characters. They're going to either be in a different situation or they're going to look really different.'"

"I think my character is a survivor," says Zagorsky, "and she's going to do what it takes to keep going. She's not without fear, but she's really brave. It's an interesting thing this season to figure out which side she's on."

Helix: Season Two will air in the US in 2015.

It's a change of location for the characters of *Helix* in Season Two.



FIVE THINGS WITH CARY ELWES

The *Princess Bride* star discusses his new memoir, recalls André the Giant and talks about being part of a classic

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

1 "This is a special book..."

Cary Elwes has had an incredible career both within the genre and without, but he's decided that the time has come to look back at a very special film on his resume: *The Princess Bride*. "I can't underestimate how important this film was to me in my life and my career, and so I wanted to share with the fans not only how grateful I am, but just how much fun it was to make the film. Because we always get asked, myself, the filmmakers and my co-stars, 'Was it as much to make the film as it looked?' and I always tell fans, 'It was more fun than it looked.' And it was. It really was."

2 "As you wish"

Elwes was understandably nervous when embarking on writing the book, and looked for advice from the man responsible for it all: William Goldman. "It's his favourite book, screenplay and film, which is saying a lot from the man who wrote *Butch Cassidy!*" he tells us. "At first he said no; that I shouldn't do it and he wasn't excited about the idea. I said, 'Bill, I'll write the first two chapters, and if you still think it's not worthy then I'll call Simon & Schuster and let them know!' So I sat on pins and needles for a week while he read it, and then he called me back and gave me the green light. Thank God!"

3 "Stop saying that!"

It's a wonderful fact of life that there is a *Princess Bride* quote for any situation, but you have to wonder whether the stars ever get tired of hearing them. Would Mandy Patinkin really want to be told that your name is Inigo Montoya? "I get it very easy," laughs Elwes. "I usually get women wanting me to whisper the three words in their ear, you know? But poor Wally Shawn, if he misses an elevator, he gets yelled that one word at him! Billy Crystal can't go into a supermarket deli section ever again without somebody thinking they're giving him that line for the very first time, that he's never heard it! But it's a wonderful thing."

4 "Anybody wanna peanut?"

As Elwes' book shows, there's no shortage of amazing stories from the set, but his favourite memory of the much-missed André the Giant was a chat about his childhood. "One day he said, 'Come here, boss,'" he recalls. "He pulled out all these photographs, and he proceeded to tell me his life story." This tale included the fact that when Andre couldn't fit on the school bus, his father convinced a neighbour with a convertible to take him to school: Samuel Beckett. "I said 'What? Samuel Beckett the playwright?' He goes 'Yes, boss, yes.' I said 'Wow André, that's incredible, what did you guys talk about?' He goes 'Mostly cricket.'"

5 "Wuv, twue wuv, will fowow you foweve..."

As the years go on, *The Princess Bride* has continued to find its way to new generations of moviegoers. It's amazing to think that it struggled to find an audience at the time of its release, but there is no denying that it's one of the most unequivocally adored films of all time, being almost timeless in nature. "I think that's a testament to Bill Goldman and to Rob [Reiner] really," says Elwes. "It's very rare today that families can enjoy a film together, and it's a tale about true love, so it's got a good heart about it. As an actor, you're very lucky if any movie you've been a part of resonates with an audience, so I think we all feel very blessed that this film is now so beloved."



As You Wish: Inconceivable Tales From The Making Of The Princess Bride by Cary Elwes is available to buy now, published by Simon & Schuster.



TALL TALES

INTO THE WOODS: WILL YOU BE LURED IN?

The cast give their thoughts on Rob Marshall's blockbuster update of the Sondheim musical

WORDS JULIDE TANRIVERDI

Into *The Woods* certainly has the appeal of a cinematic gingerbread house – the sugar treats being the massive cast, with names like Meryl Streep, Johnny Depp, Emily Blunt, Chris Pine, Anna Kendrick and James Corden, the clever Stephen Sondheim songs and even the colourful costumes by Coleen Atwood. On top of it all, director Rob Marshall can claim the last Oscar win for a musical in the Best Picture category (*Chicago* in 2002). All this might be enough to lure viewers into this Disney extravaganza – after all, it is tough to resist when Meryl Streep is playing an evil blue-haired witch and Johnny Depp a zoot-suit wearing wolf.

But don't expect this to be a simple adaptation of the Landmark production by Sondheim and James Lapine. It tells the story of a childless baker (Corden) and his wife (Blunt) who want to lift the curse of an evil witch (Streep) in order to procreate. While they are in the woods, they run into various Brothers Grimm fairy tale characters, like Little Red Riding Hood (Lilla Crawford), Rapunzel (Mackenzie Mauzy) and Cinderella (Kendrick) – which is where events take a dark and decidedly un-fairy tale-like turn.

Obviously, this is not your usual 'happily ever after' Disney material, which is why it has been changed/toned

down for the film version. Marshall gets a chance for his own take, which he calls the "post-9/11 fairy tale" and explains, "Sondheim and Lapine were ahead of their time when they wrote it. The comforting knowledge that we are not alone in this unstable world gives us all that glimmer of hope." Marshall worked closely with the two creators, with Lapine writing the screenplay.

Even though some characters still get their original stage treatment, others are of the blink-and-you-miss-it variety, like Johnny Depp's wolf. But the talented actors might satisfy musical lovers, as there are no Russell Crowe-in-*Les Misérables*-style missteps. Chris Pine enjoyed the challenge as Prince Charming, and has a few scene-stealing moments in the movie. "My agent told me about it, and I signed on without knowing what I was getting myself into. But I had a lot of fun playing a guy with big hair and a tan who is in love with himself."

Blunt, who was hiding her baby bump during the shoot, loved the music and her role. "She is like this Midwestern housewife who never left her town and reads *People* magazine. And suddenly George Clooney knocks on the door and asks, 'Do you want to make out?' Of course she would say yes," she laughs,

referring to Prince Charming. "But you are already married to Brad Pitt," jokes Corden. The comedian said that he told his wife in all seriousness that he thinks he is going to be fired from the movie while still in rehearsal. "It is inconceivable to me that I belong in this company. This feels like a huge mistake," he said self-deprecatingly.

Into The Woods has been staged many times, but Streep wanted to find her "own inner witch" instead of borrowing from the stage actresses: "I usually steal from men because nobody notices," she claimed at the press conference. She also relished the opportunity to be part of "a great piece of American theatre history." Upon being asked how she prepared for the 'rap song' in the prologue, she giggled: "I haven't really done my real rap scene. I'm saving that up. I don't want to show you everything!" She then added. "I don't know. When Stephen wrote that, was he aware? Did they even call it 'rap' then?" She was also delighted to play a witch, stating that she understood her character's motivation, and that she was "just protecting her daughter. Frankly, would you let your daughter go off with Billy Magnussen?"

Actress Christine Baranski could also relate to her role as Cinderella's stepmother. "They call her evil, but she is just narcissistic and opportunistic. All she wants is for her daughters to marry up."

All in all, it sounds like the most fun you can have at the cinema. As the mother of Jack (Daniel Huttleston), she keeps smacking the boy on the head. "No worries, he is fine. No children were harmed in the making of this movie. But we did use children. At the theatre they are like, what? 37?! And the cow is of paper Mache. Ours is real. I loved working with her. I loved that cow! She was like my dog."



Into The Woods will be released in cinemas on 9 January 2015.

Meryl Streep steps away from the sounds of Abba for her next musical outing.



**I USUALLY
STEAL FROM
MEN BECAUSE
NOBODY NOTICES**
MERYL STREEP



GRIM FAIRY TALES

Hopefully *Into The Woods* will be an improvement on these recent efforts...



RED RIDING HOOD (2011)

The attempts to meld YA sensibilities with a dark fairy tale aesthetic backfired, resulting in a film that can charitably be described as tepid.



HANSEL & GRETEL: WITCH HUNTERS (2013)

Dead Snow director Tommy Wirkola seemed like the perfect fit for such an insane-sounding title. Unfortunately, it's just a mess.



JACK THE GIANT SLAYER (2013)

The blot on Bryan Singer's otherwise impeccable copy book, it's hard to know what he was going for here. Manages to be neither funny nor exciting.



LOVE KILLS

The director of surreal serial killer romance *Alleluia* talks about love
WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

From *Sailor and Lula* to Bonnie and Clyde, we're fascinated by killer couples. Now, Fabrice du Welz, the director of insane Belgian horror *Calvaire*, is here to present his take on this Hollywood staple with his new film *Alleluia*. Taking inspiration from *Honeymoon Killers* Martha Beck and Raymond Fernandez, he gives us a duo that are willing to kill for each other, and do so. Regularly.

"I was looking for a subject with mad love and jealousy, and so I decided to take the story and to make a free adaptation in my environment, in south Belgium," he tells us. "I deal with mad love in a very baroque and grotesque way. There are some very funny elements, and it's dramatic." The film stars Laurent Lucas (*Calvaire*, *Harry, He's Here To Help*) as Michel, a charismatic single man who meets lonely single mother Gloria (Lola Dueñas, *Volver*, *The Sea Inside*) and quickly seduces her. Gloria is smitten with her new beau, but when she finds out that he's been seeing other

people her life threatens to spiral out of control – until, that is, she realises that he's only in it for the money. She decides to join him in this con as his 'sister', but this unstable duo soon spiral violently out of control.

"They behave just like kids," explains du Welz. "They have no limits, no morality. You have that pagan, profane aspect to them because there is no idea of good and bad. They love each other, and just like a circle they are together for better and for worse. That's very pleasant, doing a movie about love without any banner of morality."

With this mad love at its core, *Alleluia* plays host to two great performances from Lucas and Dueñas. "If I hadn't found Lola Dueñas I probably would not have made the movie," du Welz tells us. "I was looking for someone who can give that ferocity, that poetry, that madness, that sentimental aspect, that fury, and I found Lola."

However, despite the outlandish characters and surrealism, du Welz doesn't want you to call the film Lynchian. "I love David Lynch's work, but there are so many people who imitate him very, very badly. We have some very eccentric scenes, with the musical and stuff like that, sometimes people will find some references, 'Oh yeah it's David Lynch stuff.' Maybe, maybe not, I'm not the judge. I've tried to explore some different stuff, and that's the result."



Alleluia is available on DVD and to download from 22 December.



REBECCA ROMIJN

79
TOTAL GEEK
RATING

GEEK CRED

Rebecca Romijn is best known for playing Mystique in the first three *X-Men* films, but she's ditching the blue body-paint for Syfy's *The Librarians*. "We are a team of highly skilled individuals protecting people from dangerous magic hidden around the world," she tells us. "I play Colonel Eve Baird, a counter-terrorism expert and investigator, and she does not necessarily want to protect the Librarians. She's the sceptic; she doesn't believe in magic."

16/20

GEEK KNOWLEDGE

The Librarians are an ancient organisation dedicated to protecting us from supernatural forces, tracking down artefacts and halting evil. It's a bit like *Indiana Jones*, which is what attracted Romijn to the project. "It came my way, and just the genre of action adventure, feeling like *Indiana Jones*, it really was exactly the thing I wanted to get involved with. I was a huge fan of *Star Wars*, *Star Trek* and superhero movies growing up. But *Indiana Jones* was my favourite."

15/20

COMMITMENT

While Romijn no longer has to spend hours in make-up, her role as Eve is just as action-packed as her shape-shifting mutant. "A lot of fight scenes and a lot of running, and it kind of breaks up the day. I enjoy it! In television especially when you're shooting ten pages a day and memorising ten pages of dialogue a day, it's nice to break up the day with some fight sequences, which is kind of like a choreographed dance the way you have to learn them."

16/20

FAN POWER

Having played a role in one of the most popular comic-book movie franchises of all time, Romijn is no stranger to fandom. "It's something I enjoy, but there's also pressure," she tells us. "There are people who have been waiting for these characters – you don't want to mess that up." However, she tells us that *The Librarians'* fans are very welcoming. "We were just at the NYCC. It was fantastic. The people that came for our panel were also fans of other things that I've been in."

17/20

COSPLAY CULT

With several years of Comic-Con experience, Romijn is no stranger to cosplay, but she tells us that not everyone has managed to get Mystique right. "A few years ago at SDCC, I saw somebody as Mystique, but she was purple. And I was like, 'Stop the van! She got one thing wrong!'" When it comes to her own ideal cosplay, she tells us that Zoe Saldana's Gamora has caught her eye. "I am on that *Guardians Of The Galaxy* bus, I'm a huge fan; I'd paint myself green!"

15/20



GEEKS UNITE

YOUR FAVOURITE MAG + YOUR FAVOURITE CON

4 reasons why London Super Comic Convention is the Promised Land for geeks

WORDS JAMES HOARE

Getting bigger and better with every passing year, London Super Comic Convention and SciFiNow are teaming up to make 2015's event utterly unforgettable. Held 14-15 March at London's Excel Centre, London Super Comic Convention is the country's biggest American comic-book con, and there's plenty of reasons why you need to make space for it in your diary...

1. GO FACE TO FACE WITH BIG NAMES

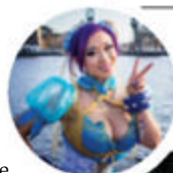
London Super Comic Convention 2015 has already confirmed some of the most important names in the business, from former DC president Paul Levitz, who revitalised the company in the Eighties with new talent and a bold new direction to revolutionary artist Neal Adams, who dragged superheroes into new territory with his runs on *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* and *Detective Comics*. Also confirmed are Alan Moore collaborators Dave Gibbons (*Watchmen*) and David Lloyd (*V For Vendetta*), Klaus Janson, artist on Frank Miller's defining *Daredevil* run, and Bill Sienkiewicz, whose unique painted style made books like *New Mutants* and *Moon Knight* cult classics, and Marvel heavyweight and *Kick-Ass* co-creator John Romita Jr.

2. MEET TODAY'S HOTTEST TALENT

It's not just about industry veterans; next year's London Super Comic Convention is also an opportunity to meet some of the most crucial creators in the medium, from *Revival* duo Tim Seeley and Mike Norton, to breathtaking artists Lee Bermejo (*Lex Luthor: Man Of Steel*), *Powers* co-creator Michael Avon Oeming, *Loki: Agent Of Asgard* artist Lee Garbett, *Fables: Cinderella* artist Chrissie Zullo and many more!

3. CELEBRATE CREATIVE COSPLAY

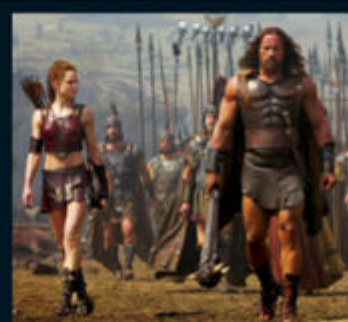
London Super Comic Convention is the perfect place to show off your superhero, sci-fi or anime-inspired look alongside some of the big names in the scene, as well as pick up tips and inspiration from the cosplay panels and compete in the Open Masquerade competition and London Super Costume Championship. Confirmed cosplay guests so far include Kamui Cosplay, Punished Props' Bill Doran and superstar Yaya Han.



4. BUY CLASSIC COMICS AND INDIE GEMS

Whether you're looking to complete your collection, score up some new reading material, cherry-pick some original art or discover some new small press gems, London Super Comic Convention has all the bases covered, with retailers such as A Place In Space, Comicana Direct and Forbidden Planet appearing alongside publishers 2000 AD and Panini UK. You are guaranteed to find something that you want to add to your collection.

Get your ticket and find out more from LondonSuperComicConvention.com!



THE ART OF FANTASY

Weta talk about *Hercules* and the future for the house Xena built

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

Thanks to their work on everything from *Xena* and *Bad Taste* to *The Hobbit* and *Avatar*, effects company Weta has won the admiration and adoration of the industry and the fans.

"Yeah, we're incredibly spoilt," laughs designer Paul Tobin. "We do tend to take it for granted! Like any job after a while, sometimes you do have those little moments where you pinch yourself and remind yourself where you are."

We were talking to Tobin about his work designing the concept art for Brett Ratner's surprisingly fun *Hercules*, which offered a funny, subversive take on the famous demi-god (played by Dwayne 'The Rock' Johnson). "It was a really clever script in that they were trying to have their cake and eat it too. They're trying to cut to heart of the myth which is the reality."

The film gives Hercules incredible strength that's backed up by his trusty band of warriors, and it was up to Tobin to give them each their own individual look. "It was an easier brief than *The Hobbit*, where you've got a bunch of short bearded dwarfs, that's pretty much the description for all of them," he remembers. "One of the key briefs that we had was showing Hercules, but then showing this amazing ensemble group behind him."

Hercules might fall into the fantasy adventure category, but Weta has its arty fingers in a lot of pies at the moment, spanning an incredible range of genres. "When Weta first started off, it was very much a swords-and-sandals kind of company. *Xena* and *Hercules*, and then there was *Lord Of The Rings*," Tobin tells us. "The change really kicked off when we started working on *Halo*. Now, you just have this incredible diversity of projects that you can work on."

One of those projects is *Mad Max: Fury Road*, which Tobin tells us is top secret. "From what I saw it was looking amazing, and I have to say that I was really excited by that trailer!"

Hercules is available now on Blu-ray, 3D Blu-ray and DVD, distributed by Paramount Home Entertainment.

THE SCIFINOW ANNUAL

All this year's best bits and more in one place

The makers of SciFiNow are proud to present the first ever SciFiNow Annual. Make someone's Christmas with the perfect geek stocking filler, or keep it for yourself to add to your collection.

Read all the best stories from all the top films of the year, including *Guardians Of The Galaxy*, *Godzilla*, *The Lego Movie* and *Interstellar*, and lose yourself in TV with features on *Hannibal*, *Doctor Who*, *The Walking Dead*, *Game Of Thrones* and loads more.

Feast your eyes on our definitive guide to the year's best and most beautiful movie posters with entries from films across the sci-fi, fantasy and horror genres, including *Under The Skin*, *Horns* and *The Purge: Anarchy*. Did you favourite make the cut?

An annual wouldn't be an annual without puzzles and games, so guess what: it's got that too! Help *Utopia's* Arby find Jessica Hyde in a rock-solid maze game, test your observation skills in a *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*-themed spot the difference, and basically have an A+ time with fun quizzes, word searches, dot-to-dots and cut-out board games.

TimeWarp lovers, don't fret: we've picked out the very best of 2014's Flashbacks, Complete Guides and Retro Classics, with entries on *Ghostbusters*, *Gremlins*, *2001: A Space Odyssey* and more to make the read a nostalgic one.

The SciFiNow Annual is out now.



COSPLAY OF THE MONTH

Send your cosplay to @SciFiNow or Facebook.com/SciFiNow



THOR

COSPLAYER: KAYLEY BOWEN FROM: YORK, PENNSYLVANIA PHOTO: RUSSELL WOOLRIDGE FACEBOOK: /COSPLAY10.6

1 THE CHARACTER

Thor has always been one of my favourite characters; beyond the God of thunder's ferociousness is a character that is loyal but dedicated. This is what I admire about him – regardless of the situation, Thor does what is right, even if it may cause him harm. A great example of this – and one of my favourite versions of Thor – is J Michael Straczynski's *Thor*. Thor is outcast from Asgard, and yet he returns to defend his people even under the threat of execution. I see Thor as strong, confident, and a symbol of all things good.

2 THE COSTUME

The costume started out as an idea that I repeatedly bounced off of my fellow cosplayers (Cosplay 10.6). The most difficult task while making the outfit was creating my helmet and trying to find the perfect weight balance and size. After I figured this out, the armour and hammer were a piece of cake. My helmet consisted of craft foam and paperclay, and involved meticulous painting. Each and every piece on my helmet has been cut by hand and layered to give it dimension.

3 THE DESIGN

I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I wanted to cosplay a female version of Thor. I decided on a hybrid version that complemented my fellow cosplayer's Forties-style Captain America, incorporated color and streamlined details from 'big-screen' Thor, and had classic comic-book inspiration. I included key elements that were identifiable as Thor, such as the blonde hair, make-up that read as 'strong yet beautiful', and one of my favorite touches: electric blue contact lenses, complete with Nordic designs.

4 THE HAMMER

Mjolnir was inspired from my helmet, which started as the 'wow' factor. I had to ask myself, how am I going to make this hammer read as Mjolnir, yet retain the hybrid? I decided that rivets, intricate designs and Mjolnir's classic angles would be a must to create the mythical hammer of Thor. To keep it light, I used insulation foam board, craft foam and paperclay for the head. The handle is wooden with hand-woven leather-like material. My Thor cosplay has been my pride and joy; it is indeed a walking work of art.

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29-30 AUGUST

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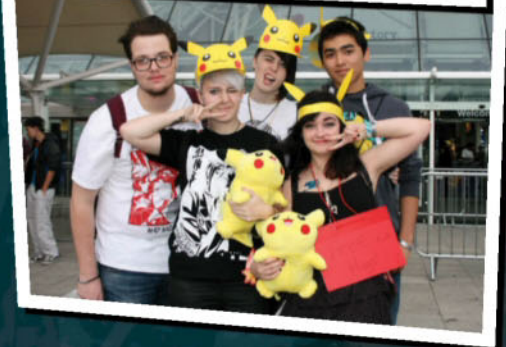
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THE GEEK 100

THE WORLD OF GEEKDOM IS AN EXCITING PLACE TO BE RIGHT NOW, AND JUDGING BY WHAT'S ON THE WAY IN THE NEXT FEW YEARS, THINGS ARE GOING TO GET EVEN BETTER. JOIN US AS WE COUNT DOWN THE 100 MOVIES, TV SHOWS, COMICS, BOOKS, TALENT AND MORE THAT YOU WILL BE TALKING ABOUT IN THE COMING YEARS...

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL, POPPY-JAY PALMER, STEVE WRIGHT

COVER FEATURE

The Geek 100



JUSTICE LEAGUE

01 Once this was unimaginable; now you better believe it's happening. For this culmination of a series of solo movies, Zack Snyder will resume directing duties, with Chris Terrio (*Batman V Superman*, *Argo*) on board as screenwriter. We have a hunch that Batman and Superman will be at the heart of things, with Wonder Woman, Aquaman, Cyborg, the Flash and Green Lantern not too far behind.



JASON MOMOA

02 The former Khal Drogo will swap the Dothraki Sea for the actual Sea as he takes on the role of Aquaman, the Marine Marvel.



GAL GADOT

03 *The Fast And Furious* star looks the part as Wonder Woman. In fact, from the first promotional image alone we were sold.



HENRY CAVILL

04 No Superman actor has truly embodied the Man of Tomorrow since Christopher Reeve. We think Cavill could change that once and for all.



BEN AFFLECK

05 A grizzled, *Dark Knight Returns*-esque Bruce Wayne unlike any we've seen on the screen so far, his portrayal could be a game-changer.



EZRA MILLER

06 With The CW's *The Flash* going strong, the *We Need To Talk About Kevin* star has a lot to live up to, but he has the acting chops to do it.



RAY FISHER

07 He may have no film credits to his name, but with extensive theatre experience, he can make the tragic nature of Cyborg shine through.



MAR
2016

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

08 Going from *Man Of Steel* sequel to full-blown franchise starter, a million fanboy and girl fantasies will finally be filled as the world's two greatest superheroes square off.

DEADPOOL

FEB
2016

09 With a movie confirmed – hopefully starring Ryan Reynolds – on the back of that leaked test footage everyone went mad for, could 2016 be the year of the Merc with a Mouth?

FANTASTIC FOUR

AUG
2015

10 Bright young things Miles Teller, Kate Mara, Michael B Jordan and Jamie Bell will don the blue as Marvel's first family. Things have been kept under wraps so far, but we're still excited.

SHAZAM!

APR
2019

11 Dwayne Johnson will star as Black Adam in the film he has long campaigned for, with Bill Birch and Geoff Johns as screenwriters. We imagine a Billy Batson announcement won't be long.



THE GEEK 100
DC/Mockingjay

NOV
2015

MOCKINGJAY PART 2

12 The crescendo of the revolution in Panem is drawing ever closer to the time when we finally have to say goodbye to Katniss, Peeta et al. It's been not so much a fun ride as a devastating one, but you just know the final chapter is going to be awesome, and it's likely to hurt a lot.



WEST END SHOW

The Hunger Games is becoming a London stage show in 2016. How would that even work? Will they need a splash zone for the blood? Will it be a musical?

TRIVIA *GAME OF THRONES* STAR GWENDOLINE CHRISTIE WAS CAST AS COMMANDER LYME AFTER *AMERICAN HORROR STORY*'S LILY RABE WAS FORCED TO DROP OUT.



AGE OF ULTRON AND BEYOND

14 Marvel's second big-screen group hug is just four months away. Frankly, we don't even know what we're looking forward to most: seeing Ultron (James Spader) unleash robot hell on the Avengers; the Maximoff twins Pietro (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and Wanda (Elizabeth Olsen) causing havoc, or the Hulkbuster armour and the actual Hulk (Mark Ruffalo) going smasho-smasho. But one thing's for sure though: after this, nothing will be the same for the Marvel Cinematic universe again. Even then they won't be done, with the two-part *Avengers: Infinity War* due out in 2018 and 2019, and the likes of *Thor: Ragnarok*, *Inhumans* and *Black Panther* out in between. The future's bright; the future's Marvel.

TRIVIA SCARLETT JOHANSSON WAS PREGNANT WHILE SHOOTING *AGE OF ULTRON*.

DOCTOR STRANGE

15 Is Benedict Cumberbatch the new Stephen Strange? We don't know for sure, but regardless we're still psyched to see Scott Derrickson's take on the Sorcerer Supreme, first teased in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*. Derrickson has hinted that the story will eschew the origin story formula, possibly inspired by the *Into Shamballa* storyline.

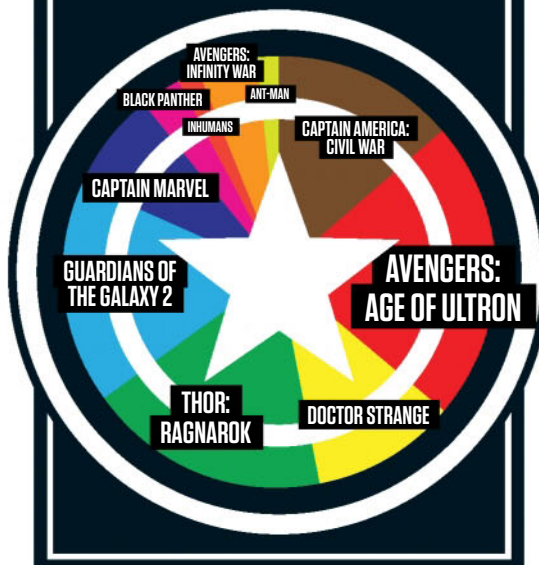


NOV 2016

APR 2015

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

WE ASKED YOU WHICH MARVEL FILM YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO MOST. HERE ARE THE RESULTS...



ANT-MAN

JUL 2015

16 Even the fact that Edgar Wright is no longer directing can't dampen our excitement for this, which will see Scott Lang (Paul Rudd) team up with Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) in what has been billed as Marvel's first heist movie. With *Anchorman* director Adam McKay fine-tuning the script, you can bet it'll be a laugh too.



CAPTAIN MARVEL

JUL 2018

17 In one of the more welcome recent developments in the House of Marvel, its first solo female superhero movie since *Elektra* in 2005. We're confident that this will be slightly better than that last attempt...

© Marvel



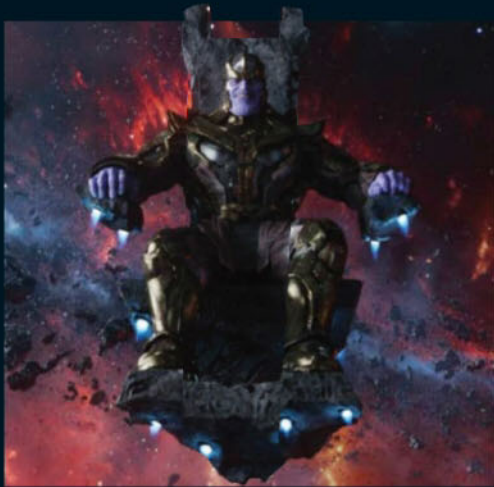
18 CHADWICK BOSEMAN

Set to star as T'Challa in *Captain America: Civil War* and *Black Panther* – not to mention Alex Proyas' *Gods Of Egypt* – the future's looking pretty bright for this guy.

THANOS

19 Having had only snatched cameos to date, Josh Brolin's Mad Titan will take centre stage in the two-part *Infinity War*, in which he'll presumably use the Infinity Gauntlet to gain ultimate power.

© Marvel



CAPTAIN AMERICA: CIVIL WAR

20 One of Marvel's most celebrated storylines in recent years will apparently be adapted for the big screen via *Captain America: Civil War*, which will reportedly see Captain America and Iron Man duke it out.

© Marvel



MAY
2016

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY 2

21 Again, we don't know a whole lot about this yet – aside from the fact that it'll be coming our way in May 2017 – but we know exactly what we want: more Rocket wisecracks, more dancing Groot, more Chris Pratt, more Gamora kicking ass, more Drax-isms, another killer mix tape, and perhaps some new blood. Adam Warlock, teased prior in Easter Egg form in the Collector's menagerie, is a possibility.

MAY
2017



COVER FEATURE

The Geek 100

MAY
2016

X-MEN: APOCALYPSE

22 After the successful sequel/reboot that was *Days Of Future Past*, it looks like things are going to get even bigger, with epic baddie Apocalypse taking centre stage. Jennifer Lawrence and messrs McAvoy, Fassbender, Hoult and Peters are confirmed to be returning, as are younger versions of Cyclops, Storm and Jean Grey.

TRIVIA IN THE COMICS, WOLVERINE WAS BRIEFLY THE HORSEMAN DEATH.



GAMBIT

23

All-round superhuman Channing Tatum has been all but confirmed as the

ragin' cajin, with *RoboCop* scribe Joshua Zetumer on writing duties. Get your card decks at the ready...

SINISTER SIX

2016

24

A direct rival to DC's *Suicide Squad*, Sinister Six looks to shake up the on-screen Spidey mythos. With Drew Goddard directing and writing, we're expecting big things.

THE MAZE RUNNER: SCORCH TRIALS

25

Thomas, Teresa, Newt and the rest of the Gladers will return next September in *Scorch Trials*, the middle chapter of James Dashner's saga. Hopefully it won't be the difficult second album.



SEP
2015

THE DIVERGENT SERIES: INSURGENT

26

After pretty much everyone died at the end of *Divergent*, who can say what fresh hell is waiting for Tris and Four in *Insurgent*, volume two of the YA bloodbath.



MAR
2015



JUN
2016

27 TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES SEQUEL

The sequel to the current era of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* was announced before the first film was even released. Leonardo, Donatello, Michelangelo and Raphael are obviously planning something special.

JUL
2015

PAN

28 It seems like there have been one hundred billion reimaginings of JM Barrie's story, but we're psyched for *Pan*'s stellar cast, which includes Hugh Jackman as Blackbeard, *Utopia*'s Adeel Akhtar as Mr Smee and Garrett Hedlund as a young Captain Hook.



LEGO MOVIES

29 Everything is awesome squared, as *The Lego Movie 2* and *The Lego Batman Movie* are in the pipeline for 2017 and 2018. That's two consecutive years of Lego movies, people.

WARCRAFT

30 Years in the planning, it has taken the presence of *Moon* director Duncan Jones to give this the push it needed. Toby Kebbell, Dominic Cooper, Robert Kazinsky and more will star in what could be the First Genuinely Good Videogame Adaptation.

MAR
2016

THE MARTIAN

31 This film of Andy Weir's stranded-on-Mars story has gone from strength to star-studded strength, with Ridley Scott directing and Matt Damon, Kate Mara and Kristen Wiig starring.

NOV
2015

CRIMSON PEAK

32 SciFiNow guest editor Guillermo del Toro will channel classic horror movies for his latest, which stars Mia Wasikowska, Tom Hiddleston, Jessica Chastain and Charlie Hunnam.



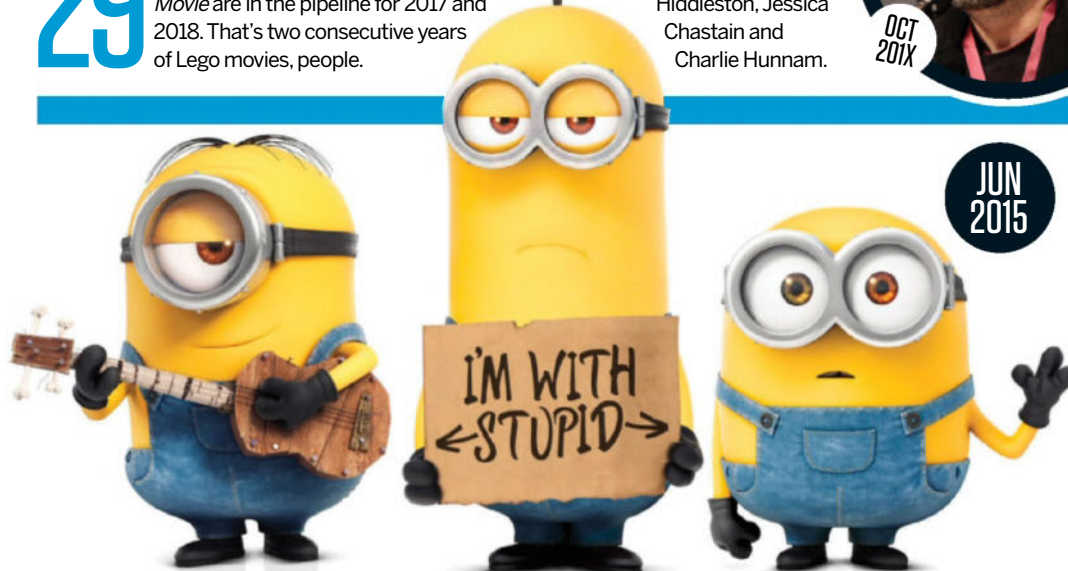
OCT
201X

JUPITER ASCENDING

33 Absence has only made the heart grow fonder for the Wachowskis' *Cloud Atlas* follow-up, and this looks like it could be one of the highlights of early 2015. Channing Tatum and Mila Kunis are two of the biggest stars in Hollywood right now, so you'd be foolish to bet against it just yet.



FEB
2015



JUN
2015

MINIONS

34 They're cute, they're yellow, and the likes of Dave, Stuart and Kevin are finally breaking away from Gru and getting their own movie. With cameos from Napoleon, Dracula and Genghis Khan, and the ample voice talents of Michael Keaton, Sandra Bullock, Jon Hamm and more, *Minions* is sure to be awesome and adorable in equal measure. Banana!

TRIVIA ALL 899 MINIONS IN THE FILM ARE VOICED BY DIRECTOR PIERRE COFFIN.

COVER FEATURE

The Geek 100



JURASSIC WORLD

35

It's been over a decade since the last *Jurassic Park* movie, but love for the franchise is still as gigantic as it ever was.

Bigger and better dinosaur hijinks are on the way in *Jurassic World*, in which Isla Nublar is turned into a fully functioning theme park.

TRIVIA THE ONLY RETURNING CAST MEMBER CONFIRMED IS BD WONG.

JUN
2015

TOMORROWLAND

36

George Clooney and relative newcomer Britt Robertson will star in Disney's latest, which sees its young lead travel to another world via a magic ring. Scenes have been filmed in various Disney theme park attractions, playing up the House of Mouse connection.



MAY
2015



APR
2017

PACIFIC RIM 2

37

Del Toro has confirmed that the sequel to his breakout 2013 hit will show more of the kaijus' world – a prospect that we're greatly looking forward to.

CHAPPIE

38

After the first trailer, Chappie's childlike innocence and charm immediately melted our cold, human hearts. The film is sure to be a fun and unique addition to the robot sub-genre. The awesome cast of Hugh Jackman, Sigourney Weaver and Dev Patel is also a huge bonus.



MAR
2015



SKULL ISLAND

NOV 2016

40

The *King Kong* prequel will tie into Warner Bros and Legendary's on-going monsters collection alongside *Godzilla 2*, but we're also really excited about the possibility of Tom Hiddleston starring.

UNIVERSAL MONSTERS REMAKE

41

Universal is transforming classic monster horrors into a big, shiny action adventure franchise, starting with *The Mummy*. A re-imagining of 1941 film *The Wolfman* is also rumoured to be on the cards.



FRANKENSTEIN

OCT 2015

42

Everyone's favourite mad scientist is making a comeback in Paul McGuigan's new monster movie. Told from Igor's perspective, it stars young Professor X (aka James McAvoy) as Victor and The Boy Who Lived (Daniel Radcliffe) as Igor.

FANTASTIC BEASTS AND WHERE TO FIND THEM

43

It was starting to get a little quiet in the Wizarding World after three years of *Potter* drought, but it's coming back, and 99 per cent of 20-somethings are ecstatic.



NOV 2016

2018

44 GODZILLA 2

The king kaiju is bouncing back bigger than ever to fight against monsters Rodan, Mothra and King Ghidorah in a deathmatch of epic proportions. Get your bets in.

MAY 2016

ALICE IN WONDERLAND: THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

39

The first of Tim Burton's *Wonderland* films was a trippy jabberwocky fest that celebrated everything that's great about fairy tales. We're hoping the sequel is just as trippy.

STAR WARS

THE FORCE AWAKENS

45 JJ Abrams has been keeping his secrets well – even after glimpsing the first footage from *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, we still have only the vaguest idea of what will happen.

What we do know, however, makes us happy: Stormtroopers, lightsabers, X-Wings, TIE-Fighters, the Millennium Falcon – everything you loved most about the original trilogy is back with a glorious new sheen. It's still a year away, but you can colour us extremely excited nonetheless.

TRIVIA MILTOS VEROLEMOU – AKA SYRID FOREL IN *GAME OF THRONES* – WILL APPEAR.



SPINOFFS

46 Josh Trank (*Chronicle*) and Gareth Edwards (*Monsters*) will both helm spin-offs, which depending on who you've spoken to, will be about Yoda, Boba Fett, Han Solo or possibly Jar Jar. Okay, we made the last one up.



BOOKS AND COMICS

47 Kevin Hearne and Paul S Kemp are authoring *Heir To The Jedi* and *Lords Of The Sith* respectively, while comics from the likes of Jason Aaron, Mark Waid and Kieron Gillen make us feel the Force is strong in them.



48 BATTLEFRONT

After a number of false starts, we'll finally see the third instalment of the classic *Battlefront* series. Judging by the Hoth-based preview, this will be just as great as its forebears.

DEC
2015



GHOSTBUSTERS RETURNS

49 It looks like a new outing for New York's paranormal investigators could finally be sliming onto screens – albeit with a new cast. *Parks And Recreation* writer Katie Dippold is on board.

ANNIHILATION TBC

50 Alex Garland is set to adapt Jeff VanderMeer's mind-bending *Southern Reach* trilogy, with the first movie finding a group of scientists investigating a mysterious disaster zone. Early days, but very exciting.

MIDNIGHT SPECIAL 2015

51 We can't wait for Jeff Nichols' (*Mud*, *Take Shelter*) John Carpenter-esque sci-fi about a father and his supernaturally gifted son going on the run. The cast is exceptional: Michael Shannon, Kirsten Dunst, Joel Edgerton and Adam Driver.

TERMINATOR: GENISYS

52 If any film franchise needs a shot in the arm, it's *Terminator*. Thankfully, questionable spelling aside, it appears to have that in the form of *Genisys*. The Governor is back to protect young Sarah Connor (Emilia Clarke), with Jason Clarke, Jai Courtney and Matt Smith also starring.



GOOSEBUMPS: THE MOVIE

53 2015 will see everyone's favourite childhood books finally hit cinemas. The plot seems intriguingly meta, with Jack Black playing a version of author RL Stine who keeps his creations locked up in his books.

TRIVIA SLAPPY THE DUMMY IS CONFIRMED TO BE APPEARING IN THE FILM.

SANDMAN

54 It looks like Dream of the Endless could finally escape onto the screen, with Jack Thorne being appointed to write and Joseph Gordon-Levitt to direct and star.

BFG JUL 2016

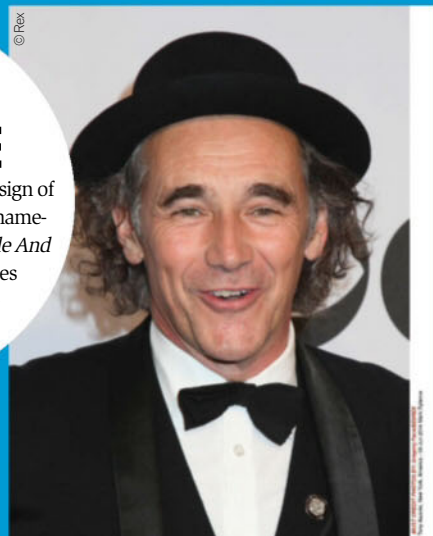
57 Steven Spielberg will return to the director's chair for this take on Roald Dahl's story. Acclaimed theatre actor Mark Rylance has been picked to play the Big Friendly Giant.

MEET MARK RYLANCE

INTRODUCING SPIELBERG'S BIG FRIENDLY GIANT

A Shakespearean stage actor for much of his career, Rylance has garnered much acclaim for his performances, winning numerous Olivier and Tony Awards in the process.

His film career thus far has seen him appear in the likes of *The Other Boleyn Girl* and *Blitz*, and in addition to his first major film role in *The BFG*, he will feature in the Sean Penn-starring *The Gunman* and *St James Place* – also directed by Spielberg.



NEON DEMON 2016

55 After threatening to do so for a while, *Only God Forgives* director Nicolas Winding Refn will finally spill over into horror territory with his latest, described as about "vicious beauty".



56 UNDEAD PRIDE

The undead apocalypse shows no sign of letting up in this take on Seth Grahame-Smith's Jane Austen mash-up *Pride And Prejudice And Zombies*. Charles Dance and Lena Headey are among the leads.

2015

MAD MAX: FURY ROAD

58 Max Rockatansky returns as George Miller's long-awaited sequel/prequel/reboot film looks like it could live up to our insanely high expectations. With Tom Hardy in the title role and Charlize Theron as the brilliantly named Imperator Furiosa, this should bring the madness back to the post-apocalyptic action movie.

**MAY
2015**

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

HOW MAD MAX HAS CHANGED, FROM MEL TO TOM

ATTIRE

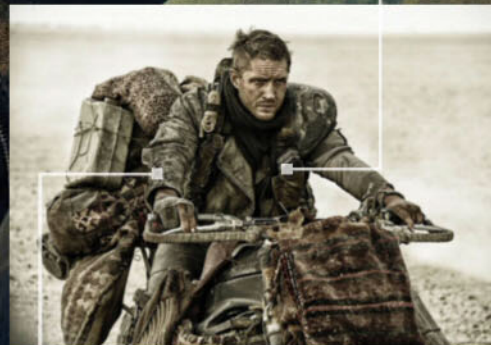
Mel Gibson's Max wore the shredded remnants of his police outfit – the leather wasn't exactly Outback wear. Hardy's get-up is more practical, safeguarding him from the elements.

TRAVEL COMPANIONS

With his canine pal having long since departed to the kennel in the sky, Max's new trusty steed is a hefty-looking motorbike

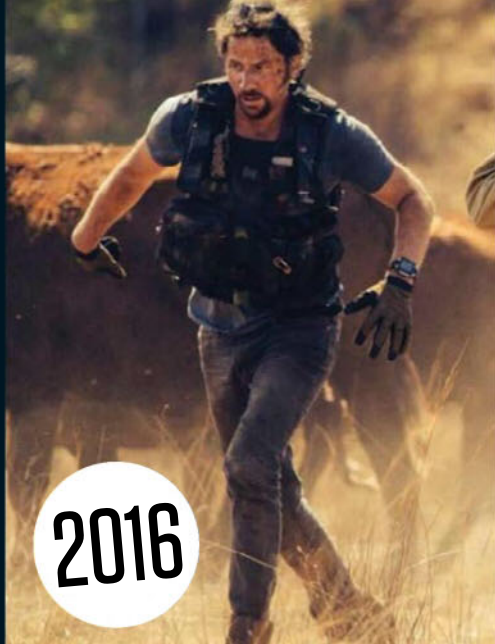
ON THE ROAD

Max 1.0 travelled light. In this new world, however, Old Man Rockatansky takes everything he needs with him to survive.



BUILT TO LAST

The Gibson incarnation Max was unhinged and unpredictable. Hardy seems that bit more world-weary, but no less capable of breaking your face.



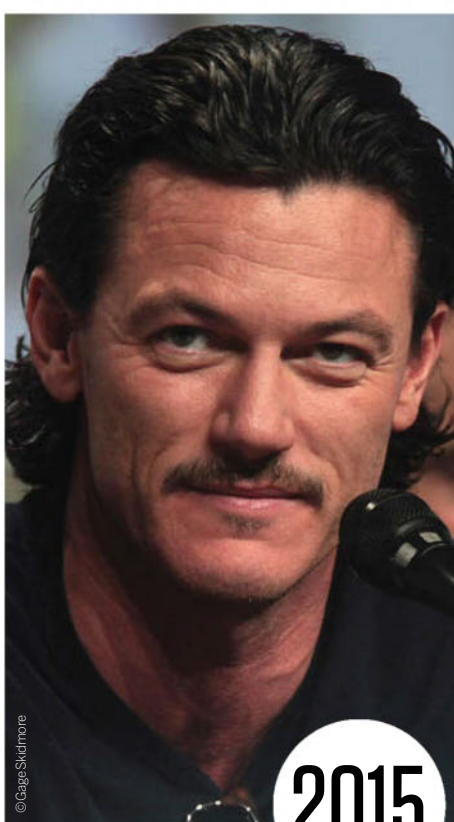
2016

TREMORS 5

59 Straight to DVD this may be, but if you're not excited for a new *Tremors* movie then we don't know what to say, especially when Michael Gross' Burt Gummer is back to kick some Graboid ass.

YOUNG ONES 2015

60 This post-apocalyptic family drama has got arthouse cred written all over it, as Michael Shannon attempts to keep his children – Kodi Smit-McPhee and Elle Fanning – safe in a land without water.



© Gage Skidmore

2015

THE CROW

61 This long-delayed remake is finally climbing out of development hell and gearing up for production under the control of director F Javier Gutiérrez, with Luke Evans set to don the face paint and leather jacket of tragic rock star turned avenging angel Eric Draven. Promisingly, comic creator James O'Barr has given the project his blessing, having been named as creative consultant on the film.

THE GEEK 100
Film

HIGH-RISE 2015

62 Britain's busiest filmmaker Ben Wheatley directs this star-studded film of JG Ballard's classic. Tom Hiddleston leads as the man who realises something is happening to the inhabitants of his tower block.

HITMAN: AGENT 47

63 Rookie director Aleksander Bach will help this reimagining of the disappointing 2007 videogame adap, with *Homeland* star Rupert Friend portraying the shaved, barcoded bonce of Agent 47.



AUG 2015



64 KEVIN SMITH

After dividing us all with *Red State*, Smith has dived back into horror with his *True North* Trilogy. Barking mad *Human Centipede* riff *Tusk* is on the way, creature feature *Yoga Hosers* is currently filming, and let's not forget *Moose Jaws*.





THE SAMURAI

65 This arthouse fever dream was one of the surprise hits of FrightFest. A repressed small-town cop tracks a man in a dress causing havoc with his samurai sword in this atmospheric German blend of David Lynch and Angela Carter.

TRIVIA IT WAS ORIGINALLY RELEASED AS *DER SAMURAI* IN GERMANY IN 2014.



A GIRL WALKS HOME ALONE AT NIGHT

66 Ana Lily Amirpour's directorial debut might well be the first Iranian vampire film you'll see, but there's a lot more to it than its attention-grabbing pitch. Recalling Lynch, Jarmusch and Hartley, it's devastatingly stylish and extremely funny, and it might just be the coolest vampire movie you'll see all year.

ADAM WINGARD AND SIMON BARRETT

69 The consistently excellent writer-director duo responsible for *The Guest*, *You're Next* and *A Horrible Way To Die* are showing no signs of slowing down. Wingard is directing the pilot of Robert Kirkman's TV show *Outcast*, and they're rumoured to be taking on the remake of Korean serial killer movie *I Saw The Devil*.

JUSTIN BENSON AND AARON MOORHEAD

67 This duo followed up their low-budget sci-fi *Resolution* with wonderfully original horror love-story *Spring*, which made a huge splash at London Film Festival. Keep one eye out for it, and another on its creators.

CREEP

68 We really don't want to tell you too much about Patrick Brice and Mark Duplass' found-footage horror except that you really need to see it, that Mark Duplass is superb in it, and that the word 'Peachfuzz' will take on a different meaning.



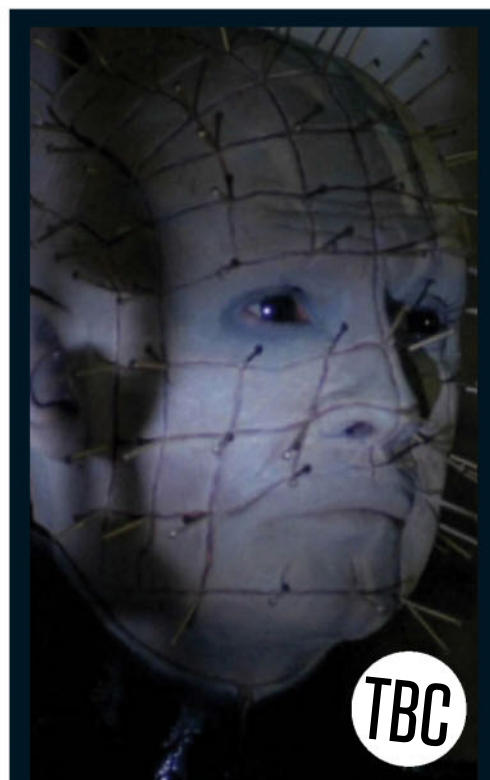
VAMPIRE CHRONICLES REBOOT

70 It's a good time to be a Lestat fan, as the great Anne Rice has returned to her beloved *Vampire Chronicles* with *Prince Lestat* and *Blood Paradise*, and the series is in active development at Universal to relaunch the movie franchise.



MIKE FLANAGAN

71 Following the superb Karen Gillan-starring chiller *Oculus*, Mike Flanagan has the ambitious *Somnia* on the way, in which a kid's dreams and nightmares manifest in the real world, and we're thrilled that he's taking on Stephen King's nail-biting, incredibly-hard-to-film *Gerald's Game*. He's also co-writing the *I Know What You Did Last Summer* remake.



CLIVE BARKER'S HELLRAISER

72 After years of passing from director to director, the *Hellraiser* reboot has finally landed in the hands of its creator. Clive Barker has revealed that he's taken the Lament Configuration into his own hands, and he's planning to direct.



© Marvel

SECRET WARS

73 Little is known about Marvel's cross-universe, grand-slam event series by Jonathan Hickman and Esad Ribic, except that it will take place on a Battleworld and feature covers by Alex Ross.



JOE HILL

74 Following the excellent *NOS4A2*, 2014 has been quiet for Hill, but he's got new novel *The Fireman* due and horror series *Darkside* in development. Plus, they're finally making a *Locke & Key* movie.

© Gage Skidmore

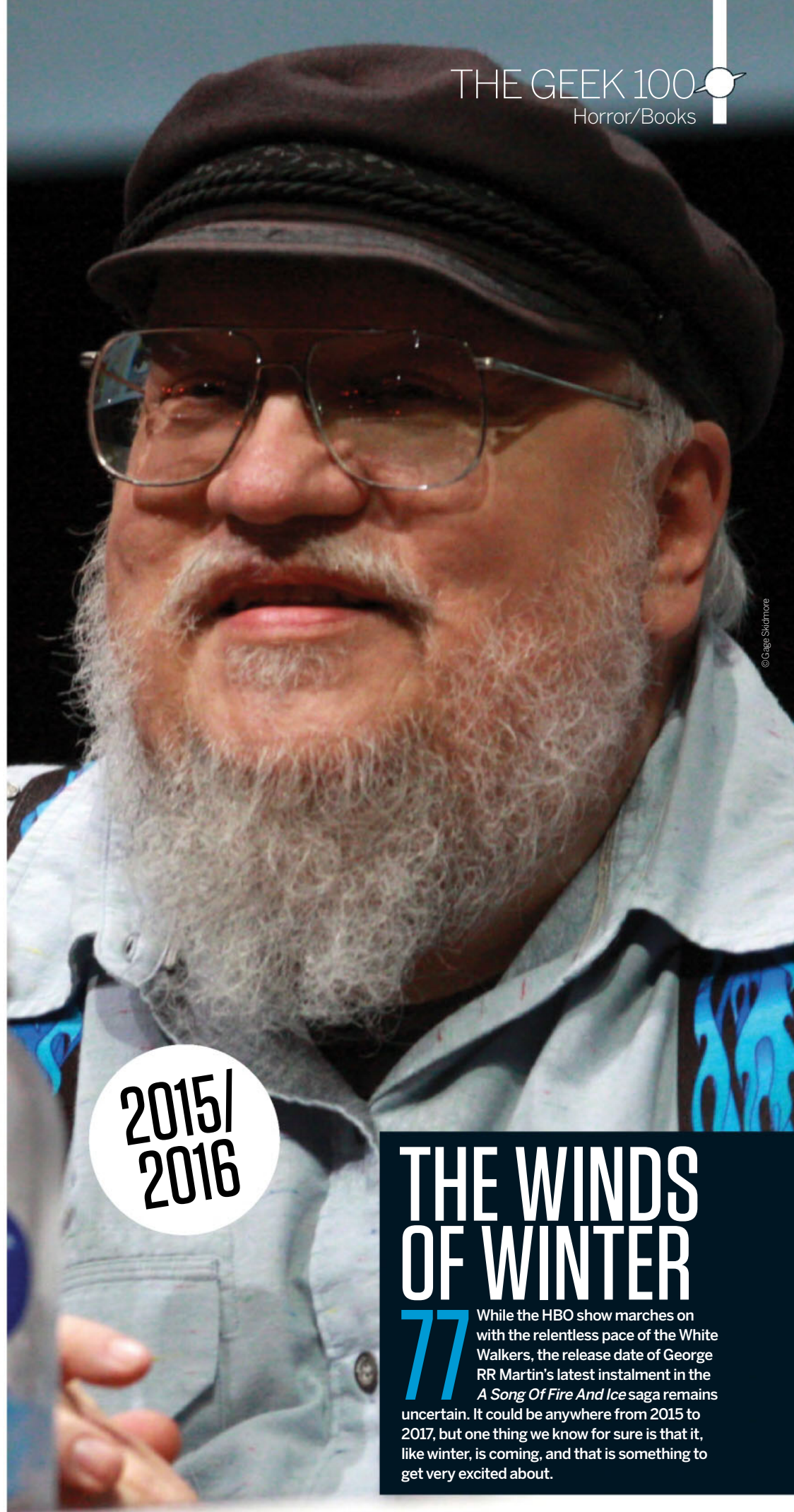
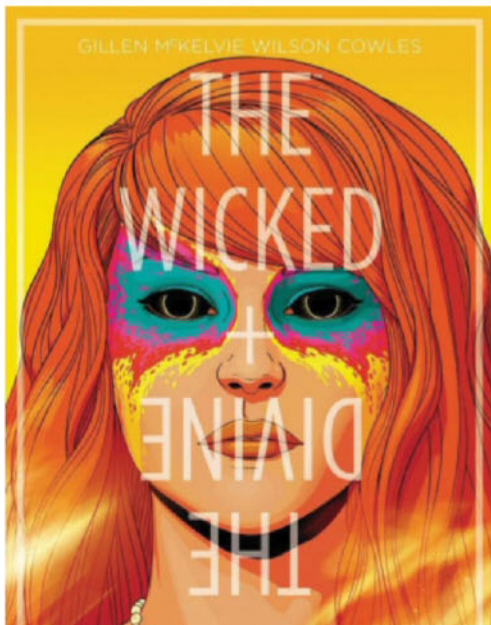


JUSTIN CRONIN

75 It's been a long time coming, but 2015 will finally see the final instalment of Justin Cronin's *The Passage* trilogy. Fingers crossed that *The City Of Mirrors* brings his hugely popular vampire plague tale to the conclusion it deserves.

KIERON GILLEN AND JAMIE MCKELVIE

76 Gillen and McKelvie have gone from strength to strength since their superb run on *Young Avengers*. If you're not reading their series *The Wicked And The Divine*, where deities incarnate as pop culture gods, consider this your cue to start.



© Gage Skidmore

2015/
2016

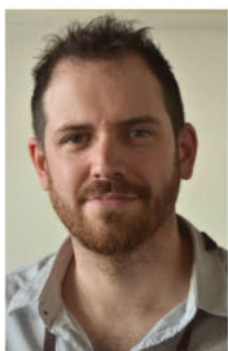
THE WINDS OF WINTER

77 While the HBO show marches on with the relentless pace of the *White Walkers*, the release date of George R.R. Martin's latest instalment in the *A Song Of Fire And Ice* saga remains uncertain. It could be anywhere from 2015 to 2017, but one thing we know for sure is that it, like winter, is coming, and that is something to get very excited about.



SOUTH AFRICAN FANTASY BOOM

78 With Lauren Beukes, Sarah Lotz and Charlie Human making a tremendous impact on the genre over the last couple of years, South African fantasy fiction is in a boom period, and we're all reaping the rewards.



JOE ABERCROMBIE

79 The king of Scoundrel Lit is broadening his fanbase with his YA trilogy *The Shattered Sea*; *Half The World* is released in February. He's also got more books in *The First Law* series on the way.

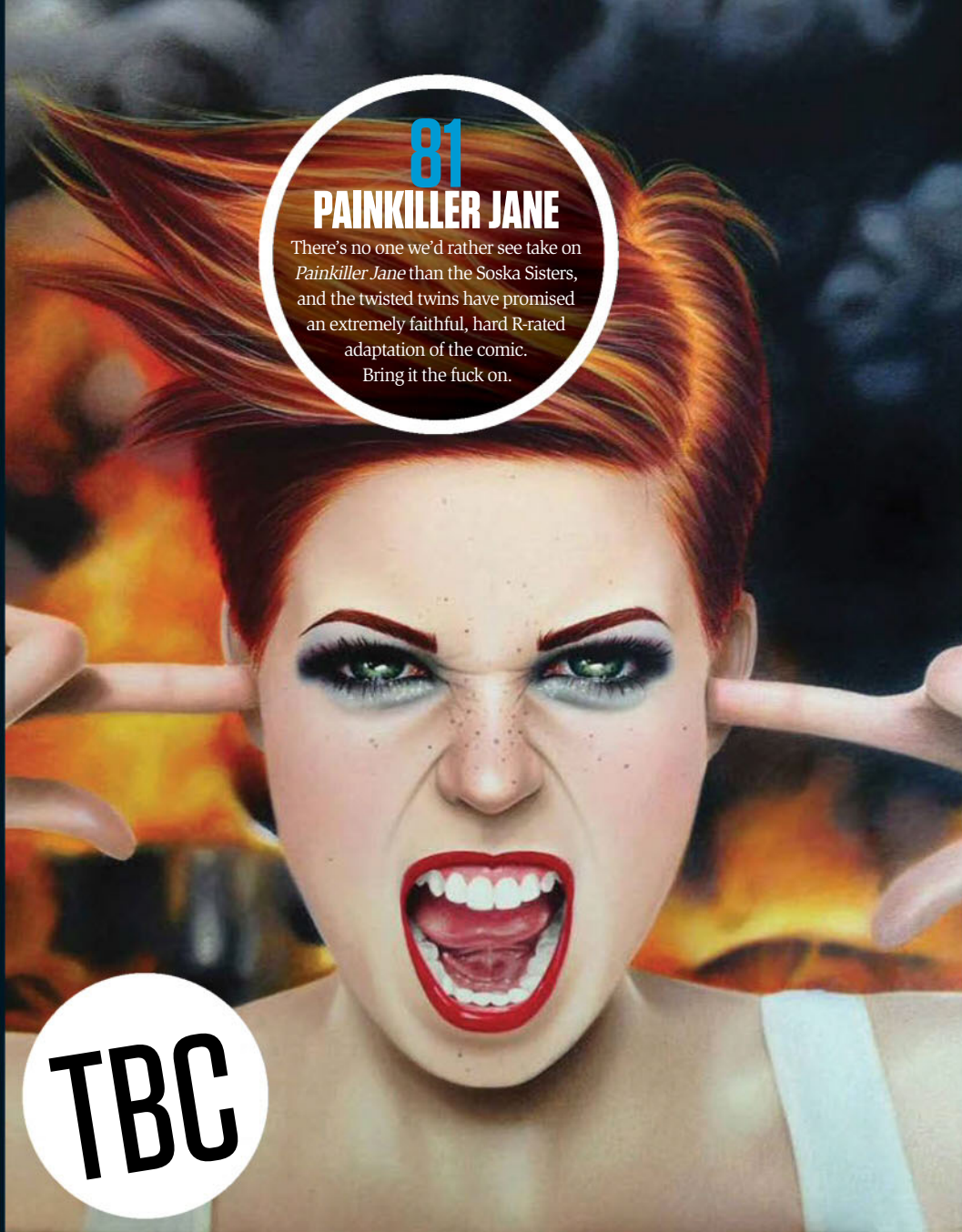
GAIL SIMONE

80 The news that Gail Simone is returning to the glorious *Secret Six* was met with the kind of celebration we usually reserve for births and weddings. With Catman and Black Alice confirmed, we can't wait.



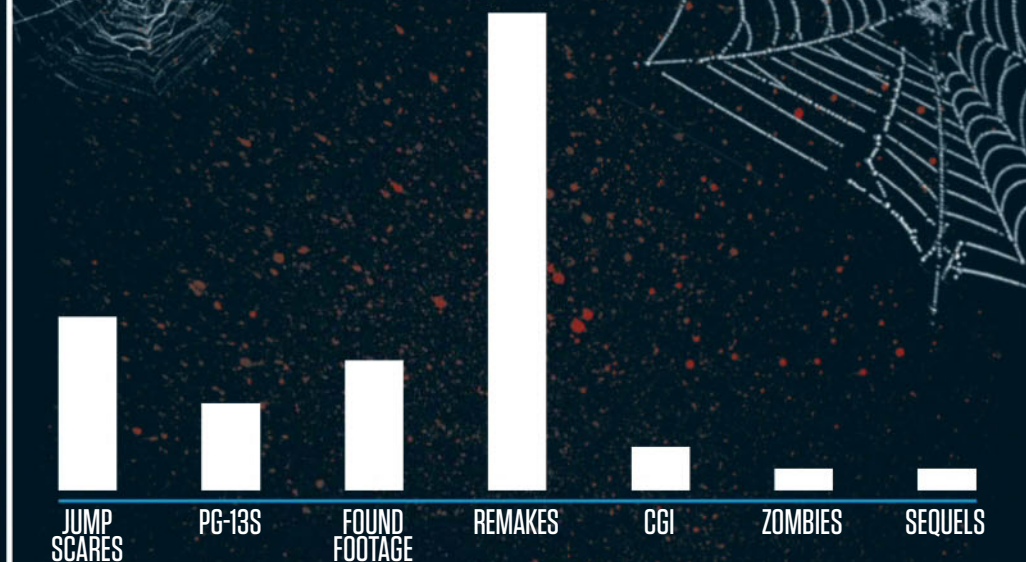
81 PAINKILLER JANE

There's no one we'd rather see take on *Painkiller Jane* than the Soska Sisters, and the twisted twins have promised an extremely faithful, hard R-rated adaptation of the comic. Bring it the fuck on.



HORROR'S MOST HATED

THE GENRE TRENDS THAT MAKE YOU SCREAM!





ARCHER 2015

82 Cosseted super-spy Sterling Archer will return to FX for a sixth season of animated espionage escapades. Fans of *Venture Bros* will find a lot to like.

DMZ

83 Another cult comic to be heading your way is Brian Wood's dystopian urban war epic *DMZ*. Adding credibility are *Mad Men*'s Andre and Maria Jacquemetton, who will write the series.



HEROES REBORN 2015

84 Five years on from its sudden ending, Tim Kring's *Heroes* is making a welcome return. The cast will be mostly new faces (only Jack Coleman's Noah has been confirmed of the original cast so far), but don't be surprised to see some familiar ones.

THE RETURNED 2015

85 The brilliant French series – in which the dead return to their families – is getting another season. It might be an idea to watch out for US remake *Resurrection* too, also in its second season.

UTOPIA

86 Those still mourning Channel 4's excellent drama can rest easy, as HBO are remaking it for US audiences. *Gone Girl* duo David Fincher and Gillian Flynn will write and direct, with creator Dennis Kelly serving as producer.



TBC

EVIL DEAD

87 Sam Raimi and Bruce Campbell will return to this ten-episode follow-up series from American network Starz, co-written with Ivan 'brother of Sam' Raimi and *Chuck*'s Tom Spezialy.



TBC

APR
2015

GAME OF THRONES: SEASON 5

88 Upheaval in Westeros is reaching fever pitch as the characters attempt to pick up the pieces in the wake of last season's climax. Expect to see Cersei wielding power, Jon and Stannis working together, Tyrion coping with being on the run and Daenerys' rule being tested further.

THE LEFTOVERS: SEASON 2

89 Damon Lindelof and Tom Perrotta's take on what happens after the Rapture has enthralled viewers. With Season Two imminent, we look forward to more angst and guilt, HBO-style.



2015

HANNIBAL: SEASON 3

90 After the Season Two finale saw pretty much no one left standing, it'll be interesting to see who survives – if anyone. What is likely is that this series will closely follow the events of the books, with Hannibal decamping to Italy and *Hannibal Rising's* Lady Murasaki being announced, to be played by *The Wolverine's* Tao Okamoto.

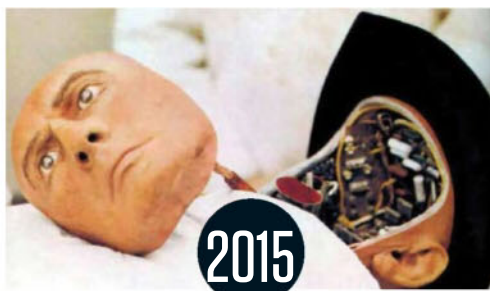


PREACHER 2015

91 After years in development hell, Garth Ennis and Steve Dillon's seminal *Preacher* will finally hit the small screen courtesy of AMC, with fanboys Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg producing.

WESTWORLD

92 JJ Abrams and Jonathan Nolan's HBO remake of Michael Crichton's robot theme park film continues to take shape, with a cast including Anthony Hopkins, Ed Harris and Thandie Newton.



2015



MADDADDAM TBC

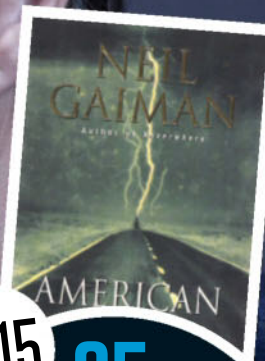
93 Margaret Atwood's post-apocalyptic trilogy is another potential HBO hit. *Black Swan* director Darren Aronofsky is attached as producer, and the two seem tailor-made for each other.

HUMANS

94 Channel 4, AMC and Kudos join forces for this co-production from the makers of *Spooks*, with William Hurt, *Utopia's* Neil Maskell and *Merlin's* Colin Morgan among the cast.



2015



2015

95 CELEBRATE THE AMERICAN GODS

It looks like Neil Gaiman's acclaimed fantasy novel could finally be hitting TV screens, with Bryan Fuller showrunning and American network Starz picking it up.

2015

2016



THE GEEK 100
TV



TWIN PEAKS: SEASON 3

97 The US's favourite oddball mountain town is back for a nine-episode series in 2016, and we couldn't be happier. Whatever you expect to happen, David Lynch will almost certainly surprise you, but as long as there's plenty of cherry pie and damn fine coffee, we couldn't care less.



MARVEL ON NETFLIX

96 Daredevil will be the first of Marvel's small-screen Netflix series (followed by *Jessica Jones*, *Luke Cage* and *Iron Fist*), and from what we've seen Charlie Cox looks the part as the Man Without Fear, seeming to draw influences from classic comic storylines of yore. With Drew Goddard (*Cabin In The Woods*) at the helm, we're confident of quality.

IZOMBIE

98 From what we've seen, this wonderfully weird adaptation of Mike Allred and Chris Roberson's comic is very faithful – which is a great thing. And lead actress Rose McIver looks the part too.



SENSE8

99 Those who thought *Cloud Atlas* would have worked better as a TV series are in luck, as the Wachowskis' new series will hit Netflix next year. Freema Agyeman and Daryl Hannah star.



WAYWARD PINES

100 M Night Shyamalan will adapt Blake Crouch's mystery-thriller novel *Pines*. Matt Dillon and Carla Gugino star.



TWEETY PIE



HOW THE CAST OF TWIN PEAKS REACTED TO THE NEWS OF SEASON 3



Kyle MacLachlan
@Kyle_MacLachlan

"Better fire up that percolator and find my black suit :-) #Twinpeaks"



Ray Wise
@therealraywise

"Happy to be between two worlds #TwinPeaks"



Mädchen Amick
@auntwendythecat

"All I have to say is, in the town of #TwinPeaks magical things happen :) #ShellyJohnson @DAVID_LYNCH @mfrost11 @CBSHE #TwinPeaksS3"



Chris Mulkey
@chmulkey

"Hank is done serving this time in the state slammer. Norm is waiting and so are girls at One Eyed Jacks."



Peggy Lipton
@mspeggylipton

"@auntwendythecat Mädchen Shelly and Norma at the Diner?"





HOLDING OUT FOR A

HIRO

HAVING INFUSED DISNEY'S FAMILY FRIENDLY THEMES AND BUBBLEGUM-BRIGHT VISUALS INTO YET ANOTHER COLOURFUL CADRE OF MARVEL SUPERHEROES, BIG HERO 6 LOOKS SET TO KICK-START 2015 IN STYLE. DIRECTORS DON HALL AND CHRIS WILLIAMS TALK US THROUGH THE HOUSE OF MOUSE'S FIRST FORAY INTO BIG-SCREEN HEROICS...

EVER SINCE ITS ACQUISITION, MARVEL STUDIOS HAS SERVED ITS DISNEY CORPORATE PARENTS WELL, FROM AVENGERS ASSEMBLE AND IRON MAN 3 TO *Thor: The Dark World* and *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, with an additional slate of films that will fill out the rest of the decade and beyond. With the release of *Big Hero 6*, the question is whether or not they are going to be able to return the favour. Inspired by the Marvel comic series of the same name, *Big Hero 6* is the first property

from the house that Stan Lee helped build to be produced in CG animation, and as such it seems to be in safe hands considering Disney's track record in recent years, including *Bolt*, *Wreck-It Ralph* and *Frozen*.

Big Hero 6 focuses on robotics prodigy Hiro Hamada (voiced by Ryan Potter), who learns to harness his genius – thanks to his brilliant brother Tadashi (Daniel Henney) and their like-minded friends, adrenaline junkie GoGo Tomago (Jamie Chung), neatnik Wasabi (Damon Wayans



WORDS EDWARD GROSS



BIG MOVIE

Big Hero 6

► Jr), chemistry whiz Honey Lemon (Genesis Rodriguez) and fanboy Fred (TJ Miller).

Tadashi creates the robot Baymax (Scott Adsit), whose primary function is to take care of people. However, when events take a devastating turn, Hiro is catapulted into the middle of a dangerous plot unfolding in the fictional city of San Fransokyo. Determined to save the day, he turns to Baymax, and transforms his friends into a band of high-tech heroes. Together, they go up against supervillain Yokai.

The film is directed by Don Hall and Chris Williams, who respectively helmed the 2011 big-screen version of *Winnie The Pooh* and the aforementioned *Bolt*. *Big Hero 6* is essentially a hybrid of both sensibilities.

"There is some DNA that's similar in the sense that a movie is always going to reflect the director at some point," says Williams, "and this was always, by Donny's design, going to be a movie with a lot of heart, but with action as well. I love action movies and great action scenes, so I think both in *Bolt* and *Big Hero 6* there's a very comedic and playful tone, but at the same time there are some really killer action scenes, which hopefully can stand up to the best you've ever seen."

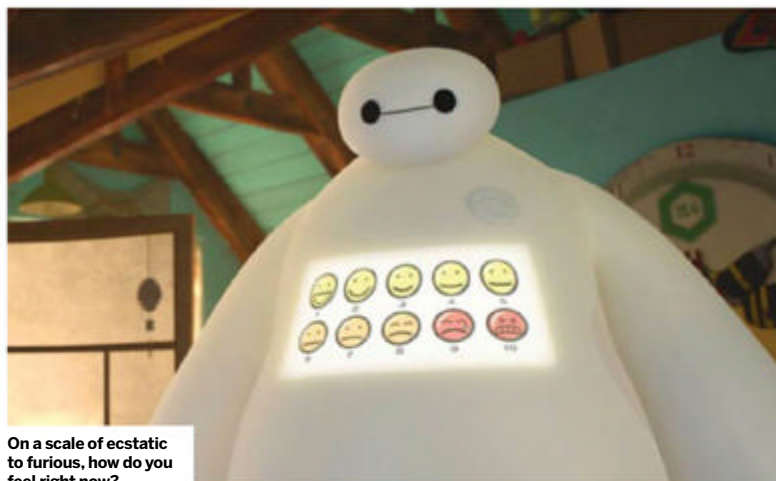
Hall adds that the project began with what he calls a pretty "typical" conversation with Disney's John Lasseter (originally of Pixar) following *Winnie The Pooh*, when he was asked what he would like to do next. Tapping into a childhood passion, he turned to Marvel Comics, and thought it would be ideal to combine that passion with his love for Disney animation.

"We found *Big Hero 6*," he says, "and Marvel was super enthusiastic about us taking it and running with it. From the earliest discussions, it was, 'Don't worry about setting this in our universe; create your own world for the story to live.' They got very excited about the idea of San Fransokyo, and were along for the ride, just like all the other directors and story-people here. Chris came on to storyboard, and he storyboarded one of the key scenes that happens in the middle of act two that really starts to establish the relationship between Hiro and Baymax. At a certain point, this movie became almost unmanageable for one person, so he was the perfect person to bring on as co-director, because I knew he had the movie in his heart and in his head, and would be a great companion to ride it through to the end."

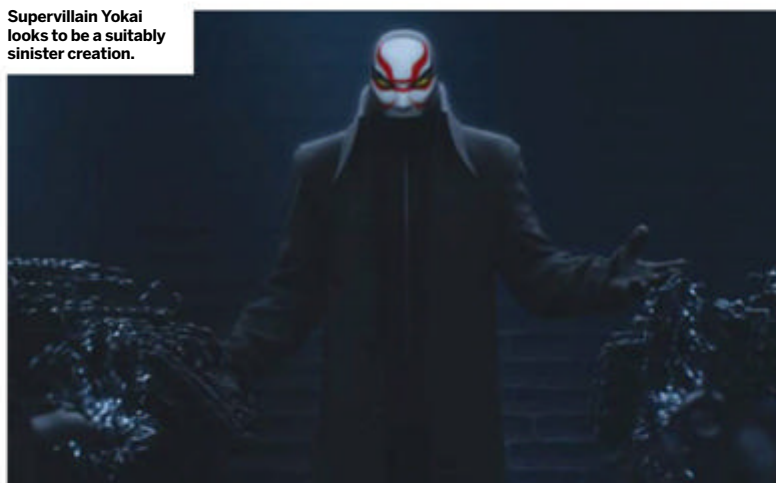
For his part, Williams went through something similar on *Bolt*, ultimately bringing Byron Howard onto that film as co-director – simply because he couldn't be everywhere he needed to be at all ►



Baymax is programmed to look after people – and apparently animals too.



On a scale of ecstatic to furious, how do you feel right now?



Supervillain Yokai looks to be a suitably sinister creation.

CG vs 2D ANIMATION

Where does traditional animation go now?

The more successful CG-animated films like *Big Hero 6*, *Wreck-It Ralph* and *Frozen* are, the less likely it is that studios will continue to create 2D (or 'traditional') animated films. It's a theory that *Big Hero 6* co-directors Don Hall and Chris Williams don't necessarily want to embrace.

"I hope that's not the case," says Williams. "They have their own strengths, and we grew up loving the Walt Disney 2D-animated movies. I think they guided our choices and led Donny and I here. When you look at some of those classic movies, they had a huge influence on the audience and popular culture. I do hope we'll be seeing more of them in the future."

As to the widespread appeal of CGI, he continues, "It certainly opens up, from a cinematic standpoint, a lot of avenues in terms of what you can do with camerawork and what you can do with lighting. There's a lot of cinematic potential that comes with CG animation.

It seems to have all the strengths of live action, but animation is still an artwork that's about caricature and simplifying and finding the specific acting choices. To be able to draw from the best of live action and the best from traditional animation, I think that's why CGI has become so popular."

States Hall, "I'm happy to say we're in a place and time when so many studios are doing such great work, and so many great artists are pouring their talent into computer animation and computer-animated films. I think we're in the middle of a creative zenith right now. Every movie is trying to live up to such a high bar, and I'm really proud to be working in animation now. When I see the list of 'Best Animated Feature' nominees, this list consists of just incredible movies."

Wasabi

About: The most 'normal' of the bunch, Wasabi is a heavily built neat-freak who is an expert at laser cutting. It's only fitting that he has laser blades on his gloves.

MEET THE BIG HERO GANG

Unsurprisingly, there's six of them. Here's the lowdown...

• Honey Lemon

About: The resident chemistry whizz at the Institute. Her glass is always half-full, with a genuine 'mad scientist' vibe about her.

• Baymax

About: An inflatable robot built by Hiro's brother Tadashi. Design to be a healthcare companion, his main mindset is to help others around him.

• Fred

About: Not as science-minded as the rest of the line-up, Fred is labelled as the fanboy of the group. He is a comic-book fan and mascot for the Institute.

• Hiro

About: A 14-year-old robotics prodigy who has already graduated from high school. After losing his brother he finds Baymax, who quickly becomes his trusty companion.

• GoGo Tomago

About: A woman of few words and inspired by bicycle messengers, GoGo Tomago is developing electromagnetic wheel axles at the San Fransokyo Institute of Technology.



BIG MOVIE

Big Hero 6

times. “*Big Hero 6* is a movie with a lot of characters,” he says. “It’s a big movie and very ambitious, and he asked me to come on and co-direct, which I was very excited to do. I love these characters, I love the idea of this film, I like the problem-solving of a movie that is taking on a lot. It’s a boy-and-his-dog or a boy-and-his-robot story, but it’s also a superhero origin story. Tonally, there are some very dramatic and emotional bits, but there’s also at times a very goofy and playful tone that I love, so the problem-solving of having all those things come together was something very attractive to me.”

At the heart of the film is the relationship between Hiro and Baymax, the impression being that the former has the tragedy of losing his brother, but it would seem that by the end of the movie he will in essence have a surrogate brother in Baymax.

“Generally, that’s the arc of it,” agrees Hall, “and thematically we’re dealing with loss in a very direct way as far as it’s not something that happened in the distant past or in flashback. It happens in real time in the movie, and you’re watching a character deal with the loss of his best friend and older brother, and the relationship that develops with the brother’s robot.”

Adds Williams, “There’s a really powerful dynamic that was part of the original pitch that Donny did here, which is the idea of a boy who loses his brother, and without him he’s lost. He’s adrift. But then he discovers his older brother’s creation – this robot Baymax – and Baymax embodies so much of what was really good about his brother. Baymax is there to fill that void and become the surrogate older brother, and there’s a really nice idea in that the emotional climax of the movie comes when Hiro realises that his brother in a sense is not gone; that he can live on through Hiro and influence his

choices. That’s something I think that’s a very true – but very powerful – idea, and that’s central to this movie, which is, on the surface, a very comedic, fun movie full of all sorts of superhero action. I think there’s a really special relationship and some pretty deep emotion.”

As for the team itself, he describes its members all as being dysfunctional in one way or another. “I guess that’s because it’s more fun than watching a functional team,” Williams laughs. “For us, the team had to definitely sit on the spine of the story of a boy who has a major loss in his life and the robot who tries to heal him, and as far as the team dynamic goes, they’re all friends of Tadashi and they’re all super-smart science kids in their own right. Aside from Fred, who is more of a fanboy, they’re completely unlikely superheroes. At no point – again, aside from maybe Fred – did these guys imagine they would put on costumes and super suits and try to fight a supervillain. That was just never in their DNA, so they all come from a science background. That’s

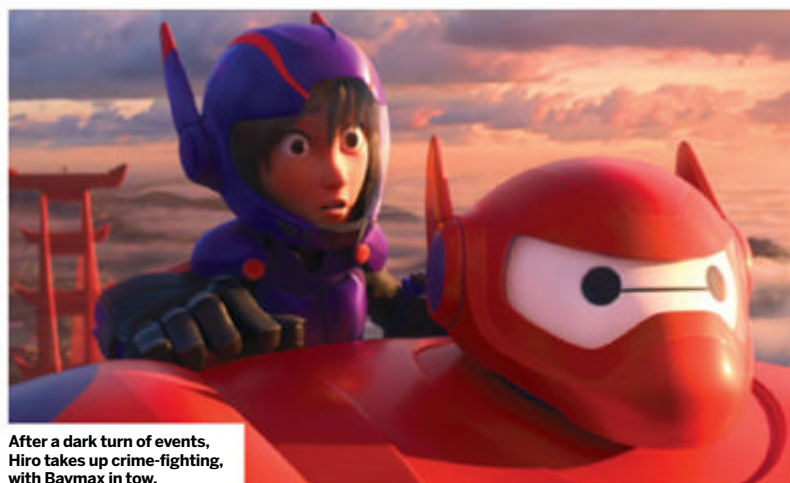
one of the things we’re kind of proud of; it’s all based on science and technology. Yes, we may have taken a few liberties with some of the tech, but we wanted to make sure it was researched and grounded in a certain reality.”

“They live in a world that is not filled with superheroes and supervillains,” Hall interjects, “so this is a very foreign and outlandish idea to them. But watching them one by one sort of embrace the notion of becoming a superhero team is a very fun part of the story.”

Elaborating on the technology aspect of the team, he details, “GoGo is kind of an adrenaline junkie, and she’s doing research into electric mag wheels attached to a bicycle, so the idea is that her physical energy gets converted into supersonic speed, and she’s dealing with low-friction or zero-friction mag wheels. Hiro takes that part and makes her sort of the vehicle; the wheels then attach to her. Honey Lemon is a

“IT’S A BOY AND HIS DOG OR A BOY AND HIS ROBOT STORY, BUT IT’S ALSO A SUPERHERO ORIGIN STORY”

CHRIS WILLIAMS



After a dark turn of events, Hiro takes up crime-fighting, with Baymax in tow.

Hiro’s genius ultimately allows his friends to become heroes with him.





Much of the promotional material up to this point has focused on Baymax.



As per what we've come to expect, the visuals look pretty impressive.



A CRY FOR CG HEROES

Could *Big Hero 6* kick-start a trend?

Prior to *Big Hero 6*, the only CG superhero movie was Pixar's *The Incredibles*, but you have to wonder – given the apparently insatiable global appetite for superhero adventures – if this film could actually pave the way for more such films.

"It's hard to say," admits co-director Don Hall. "The superhero thing has only been part of this movie to me. It is a superhero origin story, but the emotional centre of the movie is the relationship between Hiro and Baymax and the idea of this kid dealing with his loss. So I don't know if I could even categorise this as a straight superhero movie. It certainly has the DNA of that, but emotionally the threads go even deeper, so it's hard to imagine if this is the beginning of a new genre. We take stories one at a time here. It's all based on what they're passionate about, so we'll see what happens."

Adds co-director Chris Williams, "I think one of the things that's exciting now is animation is being pretty fearless in taking on any genre. I hope there will be more great animated superhero films – and more great animated fantasies and fairy tales, and rom-coms and horror. I think animation can take on anything and do it well."

chemist, so Hiro invents a sort of purse that allows her to whip up chemical concoctions on the fly, and they come out as balls that she can throw that are made up of any kind of chemical thing we can think of. Wasabi is researching into high-frequency lasers, and so he gets laser blades attached to his gloves. It's all based on their science speciality at San Fransokyo Tech."

While the duo won't reveal much about Yokai, the villain of the piece, they allow that Hiro develops incredible new technology under Tadashi's guidance that the villain steals for dark purposes.

"In the trailers," says Hall, "you see these tiny robots that are about two inches long, – they're individuals that can come together and form almost anything. They're controlled by telekinesis, and they can form almost any amorphous shape. That's something that can be used for good, and is very impressive and amazing technology, or it can be used for very destructive and dark purposes. So that's the thing they're up against ultimately."

BIG HERO 6

Holding Out For A Hiro



Visually, there's no question that *Big Hero 6* is stunning, but one of the stand-out elements of Disney animation is the sheer devotion to story to ensure that it all feels genuine rather than just a fluffy adventure.

"That's most of the job, really," concurs Williams. "We have all these incredible craftsmen, and it's amazing coming to work, because there are so many talented people, but we do need to provide a great story, or what's the point? So we spend a lot of days and long hours and weekends here in the story room, just pounding on that story and challenging everything. Globally we can make every scene better, and characters and moments better. We take all of that seriously. People work so hard and sacrifice so much, and they're going to do that whether they're working on a good movie or a bad movie – a movie with a great story or a terrible story – so you really take that responsibility seriously."

Big Hero 6 will be released in cinemas on 30 January 2015.



Big Hero 6 represents the latest in a line of CG-animated Disney movies.

For all the updated visuals, the themes at its heart remain very Disney.





HOLY MILESTONE, BATMAN

A LOOK BACK AT BATMAN: THE SERIES WITH ADAM WEST, BURT WARD AND YVONNE CRAIG

WORDS EDWARD GROSS

TODAY'S AUDIENCES HAVE ANY NUMBER OF BATMAN ITERATIONS TO IDENTIFY WITH: THERE'S MICHAEL KEATON'S JOVIAL PLAYBOY IN TIM BURTON'S *BATMAN AND Batman Returns*; Val Kilmer and (sigh) George Clooney in *Batman Forever* and *Batman & Robin* respectively, and Christian Bale's brooding Bruce in Christopher Nolan's *Dark Knight* trilogy, with Ben Affleck taking the cape for Zack Snyder's forthcoming *Batman V Superman: Dawn Of Justice* and beyond. For many, however, the *Batman* TV series has remained a much-loved and reassuring touchstone for those who find the darkness of today's Caped Crusaders a bit much.

This year, 75 years on from Batman's first appearance in *Detective Comics* #27 at the hands of Bill Finger and Bob Kane, these generations of fans have been given something to celebrate. This something is the long-awaited Blu-ray/DVD release of the Adam West/Burt Ward-starring 1966-68 television series. Seeing that fervor – and the kind of fan adulation on display at last year's San Diego Comic Con – in many ways it feels like 1966 all over again.

"It does," laughs West, whose voice does not convey the fact that he's 86 years old, "because the excitement is noticeably the same. I mean, if I put a thermometer into the excitement water,

it would read about the same as when the show broke back then. So I'm very happy about that, because people have been asking me for years when the show would be released."

Ward adds with mock exasperation, "Oh my gosh, I've been asked that question literally thousands of times, and until now I never had an answer. But thank goodness they worked things out, and it's a real masterpiece; a collector's item for people, and it's been a long time coming."

The incredible journey began in 1965 when ABC approached producer William Dozier about a television version of *Batman*, though as originally envisioned by the network it would have been a darker, serious take. Dozier didn't agree. As pointed out in the pages of *American Comic Book Chronicles*, "The producer concluded that the ABC execs 'were crazy'. I really thought they were crazy if they were going to put this on television. The only way it could be pulled off, he decided, was to make it 'so square and so serious' that it would work on two levels: as an adventure for kids and as a comedy for their parents. The *New York Times* explained, 'ABC could not afford to put the show in an expensive time slot if it only appealed to children; they don't have the buying power. 'This is a merchandising medium,' said

Dozier dryly, 'not an entertainment medium.' He decided to apply the pop art technique of the exaggerated cliché, laying it on to the point it becomes something amusing to adults."

The approach worked – in a major way. From the perspective of 2014 it may be difficult to imagine, but in the US the show was nothing less than a phenomenon. Batmania spread everywhere, capturing both children and adults in its wake and creating a whole new language in the form of the 'Pows!', 'Zaps!' and 'Blams!' that accompanied fight sequences, and added such phrases as "To the Batmobile!" and "Old Chum" to the popular vernacular. It also made instant superstars out of West and Ward, elevating them to a position they couldn't have possibly imagined.

For West, it wasn't always easy to deal with. "There were nights," he reflects, "when I'd wake up at three or four in the morning with something biting at me like piranha fish. I'd be thinking that I don't deserve this and I can't deal with it. I grew up on a farm in Walla Walla, Washington. I worked in the fields for years, among other things, and when things break that big for you and you become like a rock star, it's tough to deal with. But I know how fortunate I was." ➤







CELEBRATION

Batman: The Series

➔ As Ward sees it, he had a much easier time dealing with the success, because it didn't mean that much to him beyond the work itself and the fact that people were enjoying the show. Plus, he says, for the first three months the show was on the air he was so busy filming it that he was unaware of the growing response on the part of the public. That all changed when he made a personal appearance – in costume – in Tacoma, Washington, over the same weekend that West was appearing as Batman at Shea Stadium in New York.

"From what I understood when I got there," he enthuses, "people were sleeping on the streets, and you couldn't get within six blocks of this shopping centre the Wednesday before the Saturday and Sunday appearance. The shopping centre had arranged for the University of Washington football team to be my bodyguards. I'll never forget that appearance: I had all these people around me, and we're a big mob walking in the same direction, and I was dressed as Robin. There were

these two elderly ladies coming the other way – they were quite a distance away – and both of them looked at me, and one lady said to the other, 'Damn hippie!' I thought that was pretty funny, and it made my day. People were going nuts, but it really didn't affect me, and I'll tell you why: when I'm sitting there meeting people and I have the mask on, it's almost like you're watching TV. In other words, I'm watching people come up, and they're saying, 'I love this, I love that,' but I'm watching them as opposed to being part of them. It's like watching a show through the mask. For them, it wasn't me, Burt Ward; it was Robin.

"Here's what's really amazing," Ward emphasises. "These people would come and be beyond anything you could imagine. They'd fight for your paper drinking cup, and they'd swoon. When the appearance was over, I'd go back to my dressing room and would get dressed in my regular clothes. I'd come out among the same people, and not one of them recognised me. Nobody knew – nobody – so therefore it didn't really affect me, because it was the

“THEY'D FIGHT FOR YOUR PAPER DRINKING CUP, AND THEY'D SWOON”

BURT WARD



Cesar Romero famously refused to trim his moustache while playing the Joker.



Other foes included Burgess Meredith's Penguin (left) and Frank Gorshin's Riddler.



BAT-CHEMISTRY

Adam West on the Burt Ward bromance

As Adam West explains it, he instantly knew that Burt Ward was the right actor to play Robin to his Batman.

"I told them that I wanted to test with the actors up for Robin," he explains. "I was already signed, but wanted the chemistry to be right. I tested with Burt, and it took me no more than three or four minutes to know that this kid was right; the chemistry was there. He was enthusiastic, he was vital, he was bright, he was athletic, and he conveyed that he worshipped Batman. It was really fun stuff." Unlike shows of the time with dual leads such as *Star Trek* and *The Man From U.N.C.L.E.*, there was no sense of ego or competition between the Dynamic Duo. "It wasn't like it supposedly was between William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy, because Burt didn't have the ears," he notes wryly.

© Rex



BATMAN: THE SERIES

Holy Milestone, Batman!



character the people were in love with; I just happened to be there as a witness when they were doing all the fawning and everything else."

Also elevated to iconic status were the Dynamic Duo's rogue's gallery, among them Cesar Romero as the Joker, Frank Gorshin as the Riddler, Burgess Meredith as the Penguin and Julie Newmar as Catwoman. Additionally, in the show's third and final season, Yvonne Craig was added as Batgirl, and she too became an instant star. With all of them – like Batman and Robin – playing it straight, things definitely slipped over into camp territory. And for Batman, this take got about as far away from a character pursuing justice after the murder of his parents as you could get.

"You're right," says West. "In the comics, Bruce was crazy. I mean, Batman's nutty, so I kind of played it that way and super serious, and always moving, musing, trying to put clues together and very physical and solemn. We didn't need all those explosions and flames and people blowing up. We didn't need that, because we planned to be funny, and yet be wonderfully exciting for the kids. This wasn't the Dark Knight; I decided to be the Bright Knight, and to bring the laughs."

As noted, Craig joined the show in the dual role of Batgirl/Barbara Gordon, who was the daughter of Commissioner Gordon. For her, the approach made perfect sense given the times. In fact, it is reflective of why people are so excited about the series' disc release today.

"It's a sign of our times," she says. "Everyone would like to go back to Flower Power rather than blowing people up in these different places, so I think people are looking for an escape. This is not only an escape, but it's silly and fun and pretty. And all of those

bright colours, which really helped to interest little kids, because they liked all that bright colour. And all of that camerawork. Yet there was something in it for their parents, so they weren't just sitting there saying, 'Oh my God, another *Sesame Street*'."

"When the Michael Keaton Batman movie came out in 1989, it was very dark," Craig elaborates, "Then I remembered the fact that Batman started out dark in the Thirties and Forties, and then when we had flower power in the Sixties, the show came out. There were people who were very upset that we would be making fun of this. Then, in 1989, when the Keaton one came out, it was so dark and dismal. I saw it as a sign of the times, and that was the time for it to be dark. It will get lighter as life gets lighter, and ultimately it did. It's the natural cycle."

The other natural cycle is the truism that the candle that burns twice as bright, burns half as long. Batman may have been a phenomenon that gave its leads the kind of stardom that approached Beatlemania, but by Season Three it was largely over. The 'joke' had worn thin, ratings were dropping, and Batgirl was added to try to shore things up. It didn't work.

"In the last year," observes West, "the studio was close to getting enough episodes to keep the show in re-runs forever, so they weren't spending as much money on set designs, writers and everything else. I sensed that maybe this thing was wearing a little thin. The first two seasons were wonderful, but in the third the audience got the sense that something was amiss."

By March 1968, the phenomenon was over, and the show that had so gripped the imagination of viewers all over the world was cancelled. The phenomenon



Season Three saw the introduction of Yvonne Craig as Batgirl.



CELEBRATION

Batman: The Series



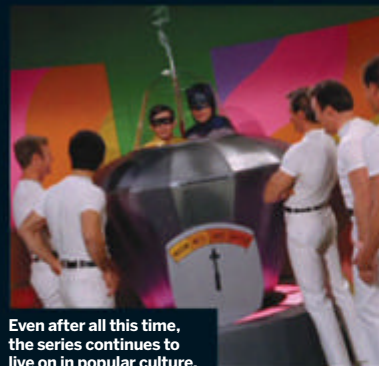
In contrast to other incarnations, Adam West played Batman straight – to hilarious effect.



Perhaps more than anything else, the series will always be remembered for its high-camp elements.



I'M PROBABLY THE LUCKIEST ACTOR ALIVE IN THAT I'VE BECOME KIND OF AN ICON
ADAM WEST



Even after all this time, the series continues to live on in popular culture.



Julie Newmar was one of three actresses to play Catwoman in the series and film.

that had swept over the show's lead actors suddenly released them. Despite NBC's offer to continue the show, they weren't willing to pay the \$800,000 to replace the sets, which had already been demolished by 20th Century Fox.

"The ending was very matter-of-fact for me," says Craig. "I had been on it for one season, and it was terrific, but if all of us told the truth, we did not know that 45, 50 years later people would still be talking about it. It was a wonderful job, but nobody looked ahead and said, 'Oh, this is going to be iconic.' I had done a lot of work before *Batman*, and so went on to do other things. I would have thought it would be a problem for Burt, because he had not been an actor prior to the show. You get in this hit series and then you get dumped out of it. Where do you go?"



Ward's stance is a different one altogether: "It wasn't a problem at all. I mean, I loved doing the show, so in that respect I missed it, but in terms of suffering from a loss of stardom or something: no, not at all. I feel this way: you win some, you lose some. That's the way I look at it. When I was doing *Batman*, it was the greatest show, and it became one of the biggest hits ever on TV. And it was worldwide. But I knew it couldn't go on forever."

West probably had the most difficult time, largely because of the challenge in securing other acting opportunities. "Oh, there was a time when I was typecast so terribly," he admits, "and up for a number of big features I couldn't do because the producers casting would say, 'What would happen if he went to

bed with the leading lady? The audience would forget the whole story and say, 'Look, it's Batman in bed.'" So I just decided years ago to love the character, because people love it and recognised that I should be grateful to have that; to be one of the few icons around."

Craig has her own theory as to why West had such a hard time. "I think it's because of his speech cadence," she opines matter of factly. "I think because his speech cadence is so unique that they hired him as Batman partly because of that. You know, 'Hello, Citizens' and that kind of thing. When he started reading for other things, they thought he was playing Batman. But that's who he is and that's how he talks, so it hung him up for a while because they couldn't erase the sound of Batman, which was not done as part



"No more smooshing". Yvonne Craig has some interesting stories from her time on the show.



BATGIRL BEGINS

Yvonne Craig on her spell as Batman's other sidekick

One of the extras on the *Batman* Blu-ray set is a short presentation introducing Batgirl, which was designed to give network executives an idea of what the character would be like if they gave her the green light.

Actress Yvonne Craig reflects, "What happened was they decided they should put a younger woman on the show because the only one they had was Aunt Harriet. They decided they wanted to go with someone who would appeal to the over 40 males – hence the spray-on costume – and pre-pubescent females. So they did this seven-minute presentation, which was to be seen only by the executives from ABC, in which this mysterious Batgirl shows up to rescue Batman and Robin.

"In the presentation," she adds, "Batgirl was a lot spunkier than she would be on the show. But when you're working with that many people on a show with alter egos for every one of them, except for the villains, there isn't time to flesh that part out, so she didn't end up as snarky as she originally was. Which I think was a good thing."

Speaking of the 'sprayed-on' costume she mentioned triggers another memory for the actress: "The costume was designed by Pat Barto. The way it was originally cut had one of the producers come to her and say, 'Pat, I have to tell you something about this costume. One of the reasons, no maybe two of the reasons, we hired Yvonne are being smooshed by this costume.' So what Pat did was she cut it on the bias and there was no more smooshing."



'A Piece Of The Action' saw the Green Hornet and Kato show up in Gotham.

of the character; it was just that he was using his own voice and speech cadence. Then that finally wore off, and now today he's hired for exactly that."

Prior to West's portrayal of Batman, the other superhero who had struck a similar chord with the audience was George Reeves in *The Adventures Of Superman*. But, despondent over his future career opportunities Reeves ended up apparently committing suicide in June 1959. Despite whatever issues he may have had, West, on the other hand, has been in the unique position to truly see the impact that his portrayal had on not only the children of the Sixties, but the generations that have followed.

"I actually feel quite humbled by that observation," he says softly, remembering his role with fondness,

"Again, I say I'm probably the luckiest actor alive in that I've become kind of an icon and people have an affection for me, which is wonderful. What does an actor want? I guess to be loved every time he goes out onstage or before the camera. It's like, 'Love me. Appreciate my work. I'm really doing my best here.' If I made people happy, and I know I have, and I've given them a lot of laughs, then I'm a happy guy. But I do wake up sometimes late at night and think, 'Why me? What happened?' Like I said, I was a farm boy from Walla Walla, Washington. I don't know what the hell happened to me. It just did!" 🦇



Batman: The Complete Series Blu-ray is available to buy now, distributed by Warner Home Video.

Although it only lasted three seasons, the show has become a cult favourite.



BATMAN: THE BOLD AND THE WEIRD

WE TAKE A JOURNEY THROUGH THE STRANGEST MOMENTS IN
THE DARK KNIGHT'S 75-YEAR HISTORY...

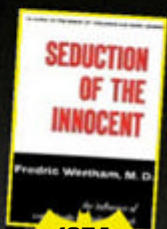
WORDS STEVE WRIGHT



1940

ENTER SIN FANG

Setting the benchmark for awful villains, Sin Fang makes his only appearance. He turns out to be an American wearing yellow-face. That was hard to type...



1954

SEDUCTION OF THE INNOCENT

Psychiatrist Fredric Wertham set his crosshairs on the dynamic between Batman and Robin, which he claimed promoted homosexuality.



1957

RAINBOW BATMAN

Batman wears a succession of multi-coloured Batsuits to draw attention away from an injured Robin. Surely they'd never do this kind of storyline nowadays...



1959

BAT-MITE

Batman's far more irritating answer to Mister Mxyzptlk came across more as DC's version of Howard the Duck. Somehow, he has clung on to DC continuity.



1970

THE BEATLES

Actually that's a bit of a lie; they're called the 'Oliver Twists', although the Fab Four resemblance is uncanny. One Direction are sitting by the phone...



1966

BATMAN VS BOMB: PART 1

Adam West's *Batman* is loved and ridiculed in equal measure for its uber-camp excesses and slapstick. Nowhere is this trait more evident in the movie.



1964

BATMAN DRACULA

Think Tim Burton made the first *Batman* movie? Think again. Andy Warhol's unofficial *Batman Dracula* was only screened at his exhibitions.



1962

BATMAN GETS TURNED INTO A BABY

There really is no more that needs to be said about this beyond the title. He still packs a punch too.



1986

BATMAN VS SUPERMAN

In the first of many face-offs, Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns* saw what should have been the shortest fight in history take a surprising turn.



1986

FIRST BATMAN VIDEOGAME

Be thankful for *Arkham City*; it wasn't always like this. The *Batman* game for the Spectrum and Amstrad was called "classic" at the time, but it hasn't aged well.



1989

BYE BYE ROBIN

Replacement Robin Jason Todd, wasn't exactly popular with readers – a fact confirmed when they voted for his demise in a poll put on by DC.



1989

BATMAN STABS HIMSELF

An example of Batman's post-*Crisis* direction came in Grant Morrison's *A Serious House On Serious Earth*, in which he stabs himself with glass to stay focused.



2009

BATMAN HAS A WEE PROBLEM

Kevin Smith's *The Widening Gyre* culminates in the Dark Knight literally pissing himself. Sometimes heroism and incontinence go hand in hand...



2010

"JINGLE BELLS, BATMAN SMELLS..."

Remember hearing this ditty? Find it funny? It turns out that the Dynamic Duo don't, as Seth Green's *Robot Chicken* posits the consequences of annoying Batman and Robin.



2011

HOLY TERROR

Originally pitched by Frank Miller as 'Holy Terror Batman', in which the Dark Knight "kicks Al Qaeda's ass", he later deigned to remove the Batman monicker.



2012

BATMAN VS BOMB: PART 2

The Dark Knight Rises was generally well received, but it had its ridiculous moments. The battle for Gotham is something Adam West fans would likely approve of.



2008

BATMAN RIP

Essentially a re-run of the 1957 storyline with added insanity. Batman donned a multi-coloured suit and started referring to himself as 'Zur-En-Arrh'.



2001

ILL-ADVISED SEQUEL

In a story so bad that it near sullied the reputation of its forbear, *The Dark Knight Strikes Again* featured a quasi-fascist Batman and an evil Dick Grayson.



2000

EMPEROR JOKER

Ever wondered just how horrible a world ruled by the Joker would be? Well, it turns out it's worse, especially if you're Batman, killed daily for amusement.



1997

BATMAN & ROBIN

Bat nipples. Thrusting. Ice to see you. Cowabunga. Close-up crotch shots. What killed the dinosaurs? Bat-skates. George Clooney. Bat nipples. Bat nipples...



1991

MY LIFE IN TIGHTS

There's being candid, and then there's this. Burt Ward's tell-all autobiography gives new meaning to the phrase 'Boy Wonder'.



1991

JUDGE DREDD CROSSOVER

Crossovers are common, but good ones aren't. This is one of them, which gained iconic status for that moment Scarecrow revealed Death's greatest fear.



1993

BANE BREAKS THE BAT

In the past, despite the odds, Batman had never really been beaten. Until now. Mexican wrestler-inspired Bane snapped the Bat over his knee.



1996

LEGENDS OF THE DARK CLAW #1

What do you get when you mix Batman and Wolverine together? According to the Amalgam Universe you get Logan Wayne, a feral Canadian orphan.



SET VISIT

Doctor Who



ALL I WANT FOR CHRISTMAS IS WHO

STOCKINGS, CRACKERS, TURKEY DINNER, DOCTOR WHO; JUST SOME OF THE INGREDIENTS REQUIRED FOR A PERFECT CHRISTMAS. WE TALK TO PETER CAPALDI, NICK FROST AND MORE FOR AN INSIDE LOOK AT ONE OF DECEMBER'S BIGGEST EVENTS...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

SINCE ITS REBOOT IN 2005, THE DOCTOR WHO CHRISTMAS SPECIAL HAS SECURED A SACRED TIME SLOT IN ON THE TELEVISIONS OF MILLIONS OF families all over the world. The standard Christmas Day schedule generally goes as follows: presents, dinner, gorge on chocolate, nap, *Doctor Who*, or a similar variant. There's no way around it; the *Doctor Who* Christmas special has become a tradition – one that continues this year with 'Last Christmas'.

After Series Eight succeeded in delivering the scares, the Christmas special is following suit. As with everything *Doctor Who*-related, the monsters are submerged in secrecy. All we can say is they're called Sleepers or Dream Crabs, and they are a lot more terrifying than they sound.

Peter Capaldi thinks the plot is moving slightly away from the camp-and-cheeriness from Christmases past – like

David Tennant's 'Voyage Of The Damned' featuring Kylie Minogue and the Titanic – and into spookier territories.

"I think it's more in the tradition of festive ghost stories," Capaldi tells us. "To me, it seems they got the balance perfect. It's really quite scary, but it's also quite jolly, and it's difficult to describe it. Unless you see it you can't quite figure that out. But there's something about the festive season that also triggers some kind of supernatural fear or belief; something quite pagan."

The story is almost more traditionally Christmassy than previous years, if that's even possible, as Father Christmas is making an appearance. But what is unexpected is that he's completely normal – or as normal as Father Christmas can be.

"What they've done that is very clever is they've got Santa Claus in it, but it's the real Santa Claus," says Capaldi. "We



DOCTOR WHO
All I Want For Christmas Is Who

“THERE’S SOMETHING ABOUT
THE FESTIVE SEASON
THAT TRIGGERS SOME KIND
OF SUPERNATURAL FEAR
OR BELIEF”
PETER CAPALDI



SET VISIT

Doctor Who

don't reveal that he's a robot or a monster or an alien being or whatever. He's the actual real deal."

Shaun Of The Dead star Nick Frost is rather appropriately taking on the role of St Nick. The character always leaves pretty massive boots to fill, so Frost has worked hard at becoming a Santa Claus that fans will remember fondly.

"There's an expectation of what people would like him to be, so you have to sort of bear that in mind," Frost tells us. "So he is 'ho, ho, ho', but I also wanted to do him slightly differently. I think that a 'ho, ho, ho' Santa over an hour or so is kind of boring to watch. He needs to be multi-faceted I think, so he's a bit like Robert De Niro in *Mean Streets*. He's funny, he's kind of flirty and charming with Clara, but there's also, there's a weird – we don't really talk about it in the show, but the Doctor and Santa have some kind of long-standing beef with each other. We never know why, and it's never remarked upon, but from the get go they are kind of at each other's throats, which is great because you think, When did this happen? Where did this come from?"

MUCH ABOUT THIS SANTA REMAINS THE SAME THOUGH, LIKE THE ICONIC RED SUIT AND WHITE BEARD. NOWADAYS, WHEN A PROJECT SCORES NICK FROST,

it also scores his beard, so Frost got to go almost au naturel with his facial hair during filming. However, the show's hair and make-up department had to deal with the difficulty of ageing it.

"They do it every morning! They paint it on," Frost says. "It's like a white boot polish. Oh god, it takes so long to get the red out of the whiteness too, so they have to put like a brown on first and then a weird grey and then the white.

"I did a Vince Vaughn film last year which I have to finish [tomorrow], so Beardgate erupted in terms of who got my beard first. In the end, Vince Vaughn moved his film, and I'm now wrapped on [*Doctor Who*], so they can now trim it down so it looks like it did in the film. You get to a point in your career where you can actually say, 'I think my character would probably have a beard,' when you don't want to shave and they're like, 'Yeah! I think he'd have a beard too!' which is great."

Frost remains tight-lipped about the storyline to 'Last Christmas'. He did, however, coin the term 'scunny' (scary and funny) while loosely describing the tone and trying his utmost to keep a lid on it.

Joining Frost in the Big Book of Christmas Special Alumni are Dan Starkey and Nathan McMullen, who play Santa's elves, Ian and The Wolf respectively. Starkey may appear to be a new face, but his voice, body and physical being are already pretty famous

Despite rumours of her departure, Jenna Coleman returns as Clara.



“THE DOCTOR AND SANTA HAVE SOME KIND OF LONG-STANDING BEEF WITH EACH OTHER”

NICK FROST

in the Whoniverse. Starkey has already appeared no less than ten episodes as a number of Sontarans, including Commander Jast, Commander Skor and fan-favourite potato one, Strax. This will be his third Christmas special in a row, but the first to feature his face.

Starkey admits that it's a relief to be out of his hefty Sontaran make-up for a while. "It's very interesting just because with Strax, the make-up is much more extreme, and I can't really hear," he tells us. "I have to do a lot of homework before I get on set... Strax usually has a couple of gags in each scene, and I have to make sure I land those in quite a specific way. But with [the elf] make-up, I can react to people normally. You can see my face. It's been much looser, and yeah, it's been fun really.

"The first day it was kind of like, 'Ah! So this is my actual face on camera! What am I doing?' Obviously, with Strax's face it's a mask that I almost have to choreograph. I tilt it in a certain way, as he's very difficult to light because of the brow. His eyes can disappear quite easily. But with this, because it's my face, theoretically it's a lot easier to manipulate.

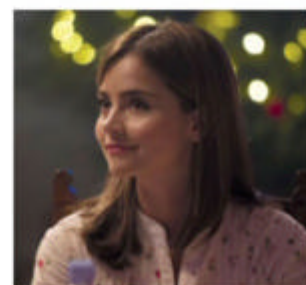
"After seven years of being in a rubber suit it's quite freeing going to a normal make-up

meeting, and having an hour to prepare rather than three hours and getting [to the studio] at four o'clock in the morning before everyone else. So it's lovely; it's great fun."

New player Nathan McMullen is used to a simpler get-up; after playing young offender Finn on *Misfits* for two series, he spent most of his screen time in the infamous orange jumpsuit with very little change. In contrast to Starkey's dressing down, playing one of Santa's elves meant McMullen got to jazz it up a bit.

"When I went to the costume fitting I was half expecting green lycra and a bit of a tacky costume, but it's genuinely one of the most exciting costume fittings I've been to," he says. "Usually it's a pair of jeans, trainers; a bit more naturalistic. This time it's a character that has its own identity. You don't have to embody it. As soon as you put it on you are it. You are the elf."

Recently, big names in British TV and film have been flocking to *Doctor Who* Christmas specials like *Adipose* to a mother ship. Matt Smith's Doctor welcomed the likes of Katherine Jenkins, Richard E Grant, Michael Gambon and Ian McKellen to the festivities, and the tradition is continuing with Frost. The current cast cannot stop singing their praises for the actor. ➔



Nick Frost's wish list

Santa on his favourite festive times

"I got a Blu-ray player a few years ago when they first came out, which was fantastic. I was like, 'I've got a fucking Blu-ray player!' I remember in the Eighties I wanted a Spectrum. There was a period of time between Christmas and Boxing Day where everything was closed, and my mum and dad got me a Spectrum, but not a tape recorder! To my discredit, I cried. I really kicked up a storm, you know. I felt really bad, because they felt really bad. But I love Christmas, and I think it really reignites when you have a child. It's all about him then, and making it magical for him."



SET VISIT

Doctor Who

"I was a bit star-struck, for the first time with anyone that I've worked with," McMullen confesses. "I grew up watching *Spaced*, *Shaun Of The Dead* and *Hot Fuzz*.
 "At the read-through I had no idea who the rest of the cast were. I was the first one who turned up, and I went to find my name, and looked to my right to see 'Nick Frost'. I was kind of like, 'The Nick Frost? Is there another actor called Nick Frost or is this him?' And then he entered the room and it was like I had tunnel vision. I was like, there he is! I have to go and say hello! I kind of had to just calm down and remember that I'm not a fan now; I'm a colleague."

Capaldi also has nothing but lovely things to say about Frost, but admits it was a little difficult working with him after getting the giggles on set almost daily.

"I don't really corpse very much, but he's so brilliant and funny that he just started to make me laugh," he says. "Of course, once he knew that he could make me laugh it became a nightmare. Every opportunity he took, he would do something else to make me laugh, so there are lots of outtakes of me literally hiding behind monsters when I shouldn't be laughing in a very serious scene when a very frightening thing is going on. He's brilliant! I'm a big fan of his. He's a great presence to have and he's such a hugely gifted comic actor."

FROST RELISHED THE OPPORTUNITY OF REDUCING CAPALDI, WHO PLAYS A SOMEWHAT STERN AND GRUMPY DOCTOR, TO FITS OF LAUGHTER.

"He's a wonderful actor, and I managed to turn him into a giggler," Frost jokes. "He laughed a lot, which is great. I think he's only laughed once before this series, but I managed to get him every day, and quite a lot, which was great because I never imagined him to be a giggler."

Frost reckons his costume might have had something to do with it. "Sometimes, you'll find that thing when you're chatting to a couple of the girls on set and you're making them laugh and then you walk out and catch yourself in a mirror or a window and you think, 'What were you doing, you idiot? You're dressed up as Father Christmas!' You know, you kind of forget what you look like. But I think it's that weird thing where you're doing a kind of face-off with the Doctor. I see the Doctor so I can keep a straight face, but he sees me dressed as Father Christmas. I think it's a bit tougher for Peter."

'Last Christmas' started filming in September, and lasted into the following month. The read-through, however, took place in July. The heat wave, and also the fact that it was July, didn't help with getting into the Christmas spirit. To keep the festive cheer flowing, the cast and crew pulled crackers around the read-through table.

"Everyone was like, 'Okay, merry Christmas!'" says Starkey. "It's so strange, because we're having to amp up the Christmas hugely over the last couple of days. I'm now like, 'Okay, now it's the start of October. It's retail Christmas already!' But in the real world we have a little more to wait."

"Your physical commitment to the whole season doesn't end until you've done the Christmas special," Capaldi tells us. "But it was nice! And it is, of course, weird doing the whole thing of having snow and Christmas lights and Christmas trees in September, because your body does just respond to it. You start to feel Christmassy. I think, oh god! Have I done my shopping? Oh, I must get out next week and do some stuff. It's very powerful, all that."

After seeing out the end of the year having completed a full series and a Christmas special, Capaldi is having a blast playing his childhood hero. But he doesn't feel like he's completely nailed it just yet. He says there's always room to grow.

"I know the environment I'm going into, which is good, but I don't think you can ever relax with it," he says. "It's too important, and it's too iconic and it needs attention."

There's always a satsuma right at the bottom of your Christmas stocking...



According to Nick Frost, there is an ongoing, unexplained feud between the Doctor and St Nick.



All Clara wants for Christmas is a thicker dressing gown.



You can't just leave it. You can't go, 'Oh, I know how to do this now,' because I don't know how to do it. To be honest, you just go in and you do your best, but not with any great plan. So I can't relax and say I'm there now, because I'm not. It would also be dull, you know, to say that we've figured this out, because you can't figure it out. You've got to just keep at it and keep seeing where it will go.

"It's hard, but rather wonderful, because when you hit it, it rings and you can sense that it's happening. The thing is that he's a character who is [...] just born, but yet he's very old, so you have to do both of those things. You have to be brand new and also connected to the past. So you have to bring the past with you, but be totally fresh. It's a difficult juggling act. So it is quite tricky, but the past is always with him."

Doctor Who: Last Christmas will air on BBC One on Christmas Day.

BBC 1

A Christmas Carol (2010)

When Kazran Sardick (Michael Gambon) refuses to save a spaceship full of people, the Doctor must help him find his heart. ★★★★★



The Christmas Invasion (2005)

An alien race attempts to enslave mankind on Christmas Eve, and only Rose can save the day. ★★☆☆☆

The Runaway Bride (2006)

When a bride (Catherine Tate) is transported onto the TARDIS, the Doctor must get to the bottom of the mystery. ★★☆☆☆

The Queen's Speech

Queen Elizabeth II looks forward to 2015 and addresses the nation in a speech set to the music of R Kelly. ★☆☆☆☆

Voyage Of The Damned (2007)

A spaceship based on the Titanic collides with the TARDIS. ★★★★★



The Next Doctor (2008)

In Victorian London, the Doctor encounters a man claiming to be a Time Lord who travels with his companion, Rosita. ★★☆☆☆

The End Of Time (2009)

David Tennant and Bernard Cribbins work together to foil the evil plans of the Doctor's archenemy the Master (John Simms). ★★★★★

Downton Abbey

The Dowager Countess is caught on top of Thomas Barrow, while Daisy finds a surprising carrot. Donny and Marie Osmond guest-star. ★★★★★



The Doctor, The Widow And The Wardrobe (2011)

The Doctor helps a family in the Blitz. ★★★★★

The Snowmen (2012)

A Victorian governess helps the Doctor save the day from evil snowmen. Guest-stars Richard E Grant and Sir Ian McKellen. ★★★★★

The Time Of The Doctor (2013)

All of the Doctor's enemies come together as he tries to live his last days protecting the people of Trenzalore. ★★★★★



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MORE HUMAN THAN HUMAN

ALEX GARLAND TELLS SCIFINOW WHY HIS AI SCI-FI EX MACHINA IS MORE ABOUT US THAN THE MACHINES...

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL

OVER THE LAST DECADE, ALEX GARLAND HAS EMERGED AS ONE OF THE MOST FORMIDABLE AND RESPECTED TALENTS IN GENRE CINEMA. THE WRITER OF *28 DAYS LATER*, *Sunshine*, *Never Let Me Go* and *Dredd* has consistently delivered challenging, gripping sci-fi and horror that's been embraced by fans, if not the box office. When we sit down with him to discuss his directorial debut *Ex Machina*, he's quick to downplay the significance of his move behind the camera.

"I understand that there's a kind of cult based around directing in film; it's never remotely interested me," he tells us. "I just see it as filmmaking. I don't really differentiate this from *Dredd* or *Never Let Me Go* or *Sunshine* or *28 Days Later*. It's just all sitting down thinking 'what's it about?' You know? That's where it always starts for me: 'what's this film about? And who are the characters, what are they saying, where are they saying it?' Then you just try and build up a team of people who want to make the same film. I don't really get the whole 'suddenly this big thing happens', the director; I just think it's bullshit."

Whatever his feelings about sitting in the director's chair, Garland is eager to

discuss *Ex Machina* and its story of Ava (Alicia Vikander), a robot created by genius billionaire recluse Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac) with artificial intelligence. Amiable programmer Caleb Smith (Domhnall Gleeson) wins a competition to spend a week with his hero, and soon learns that he's been invited to Smith's mountain fortress for a reason: to test Ava and see if she does in fact have a mind of her own.

"I think in my head it's as much about human consciousness as it is about AI," Garland explains. "It's about both, and the two are clearly related. That is to say, if you created an AI that was self-aware, that would give it a human characteristic of being self-aware. Weird things about consciousness, like self-awareness and emotions are the hardest things to crack in AI. So to me it's about the same thing."

Caleb's task sounds simple, and it comes with the chance to be a part of history. Nathan doesn't have to work too hard to convince him to sign the non-disclosure agreement and head on down to meet his test subject, but he soon realises that the testing isn't going to be as simple as he thought. Not only is Ava capable of dexterously answering his questions and of asking her own; she soon begins to challenge his right to be

asking them at all. "If you are presented with a machine and are asked, 'Can you assess the level of consciousness of this machine?' and the machine is says 'Yes, I'm conscious and I feel emotions, disprove it,' suddenly you're in a really hard spot," enthuses Garland. "Now you're being asked, 'Is it simulating emotions or is it actually having them?' And Q&A doesn't have the toolset easily to be able to answer that question. Then you realise it's also a problem with us. That you take my consciousness for granted only because you have one; you're not really assessing my consciousness. You've got it; I'm like you, so you're assuming I also have it. But I'm not really proving it. I could be simulating it too."

The more Caleb gets to know Ava, the more complicated their relationship grows. She appears to grow fond of him very quickly, and tells him that she'd like to spend time with him outside of the room. In fact, why hasn't she been allowed outside? And what happens if Nathan decides that she has failed Caleb's test? Do the scientists have the right to terminate their experiment? The terrible responsibility of a creator and the rights of his creation make the film heavily reminiscent of Mary Shelley's classic tale.

"What *Frankenstein* does, what all those stories do – they're all about the moral

⇒ repercussions of creating life, aren't they?" says Garland.

"Though for me most of the arguments are really straightforward. If two parents murder their kid, they've done the wrong moral thing, and we get that. So applying the same moral codes to this new form of life seems in some ways quite straightforward. But yeah, I guess you can't write this story without thinking about *Frankenstein*. You also can't write this story without thinking about *Blade Runner*. I'm not seeking to repeat that story; I've got a different angle that I'm trying to get across."

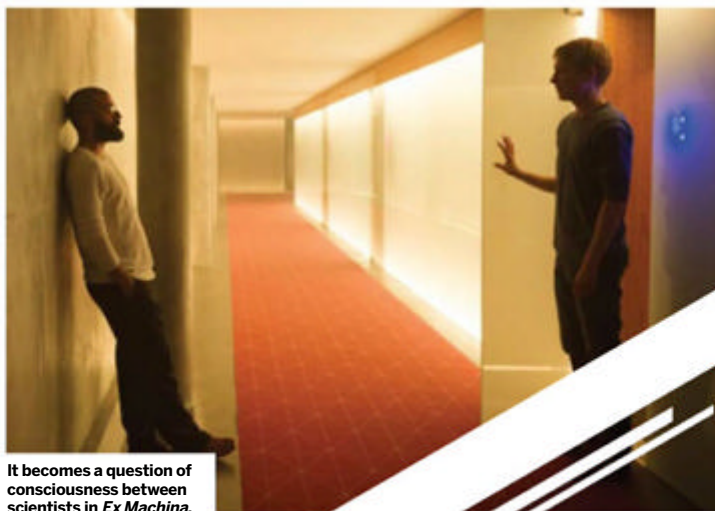
Ava herself is a fascinating creation; a combination of exposed machine parts and human features, and Garland reveals that the task of creating a robot you've never seen before is incredibly difficult. "If it's a female-looking robot it's incredibly hard to get away from *Metropolis*. I was working on the early stages of Ava's design with [comic-book artist] Jock, and we discovered all sorts of things. If Ava was coloured gold she was C-3PO. It didn't matter what you did. If you gave her a lot of white plastic in body structure, she immediately became Chris Cunningham's Björk video [*All Is Full Of Love*], which got used by *I, Robot* as well. So it was important to get her away from all those previous models, because she has to feel fresh, and we have to feel surprised by her. And then stop feeling surprised and start thinking of her as a person."

That task of altering our perception falls to Alicia Vikander, the Swedish star of *Anna Karenina*. It's a stunning performance that finds the uncanny blend of artificial and emotional, and Garland is effusive in his praise of his star. "Alicia had very clear ideas," he remembers. "Alicia put herself on tape, and just did it beautifully right off the bat. She's a very unusual actor because she has a huge amount of ability on an emotional range; she vanishes into parts. If you watch her in different films, you don't see the same person recurring. She was also trained as a ballerina, and so on top of that acting facility, she's got a very, very precise physical control, well beyond anything as a human that I've got as I walk across a room and trip on a bit of furniture, she's pretty exceptional. She could put a precision in her movement that is machine-like to an extent but is also kind of graceful. It also has something very subtly unnatural about it."

On the other side of the reinforced plexiglass is Domhnall Gleeson, who continues his incredible run (this last year has seen him in *Calvary* and *Frank*, with *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* on the horizon) via his performance as the naïve, wide-eyed loner who begins to suspect that his mentor might not be telling him the whole truth. "It's the third time I've worked with Domhnall,"



Domhnall Gleeson plays Caleb, a guy who wins the competition of a lifetime.



It becomes a question of consciousness between scientists in *Ex Machina*.

I DON'T THINK OF MYSELF AS A SCI-FI WRITER; I JUST SEE MYSELF AS A WRITER WHO LOVES SCI-FI
ALEX GARLAND

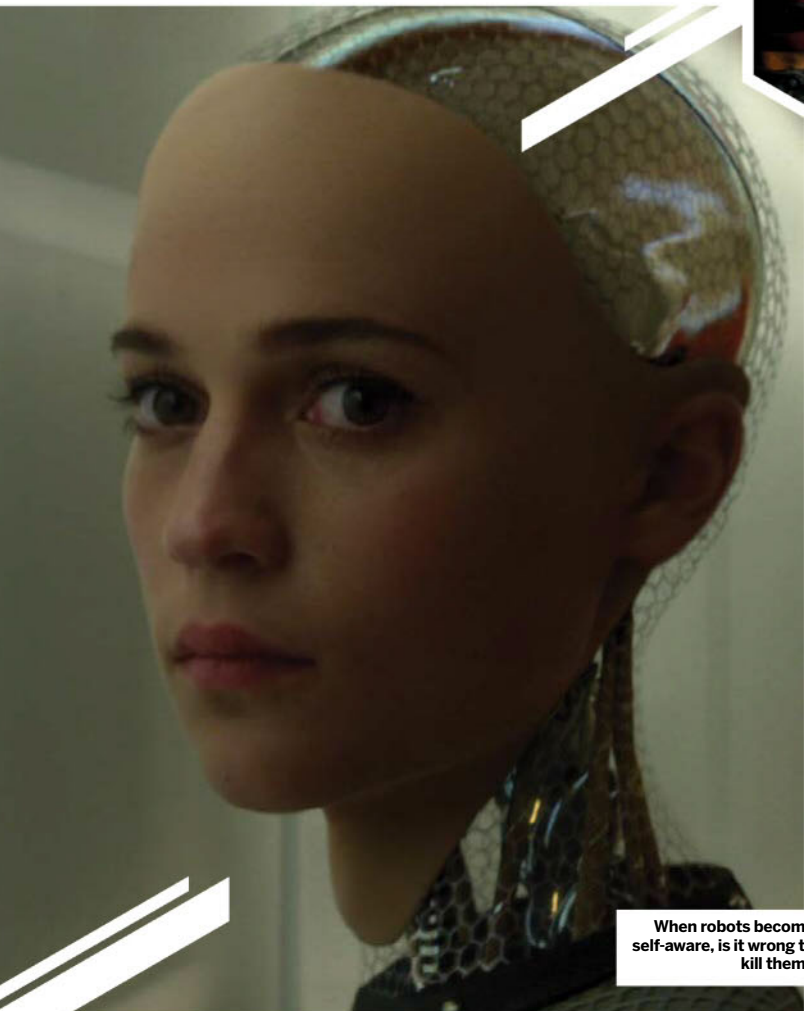
explains Garland. "The reason I knew he'd be right for this is because he can project vulnerability, and with a lot of male actors they're too alpha to be able to project vulnerability convincingly. Either you think they're weak in a kind of irksome way or you think, 'you're pretending to be vulnerable, but you're not really. You're going to come out fists swinging in a moment.' Domhnall is able to portray vulnerability in a very complex way that pulls you in rather than pushes you out. Also, I just really enjoyed working with him on *Dredd* and *Never Let Me Go*, so it was lovely to have him around again. He's an amazing actor."

As Caleb begins to challenge Nathan, it soon becomes clear that the creator is all

too aware of the significance of what he's done, and Gleeson's *Star Wars* co-star Isaac (*Inside Llewellyn Davis*) finds the tortured mind behind the arrogance. "He's a bit like Kurtz in *Heart Of Darkness* or *Apocalypse Now* in its film version; he's spent too much time upriver," explains Garland. "He's spent too much time talking to machines, and lost himself a bit. I was interested in the [J Robert] Oppenheimer thing... Oppenheimer was incredibly troubled by having built the atomic bomb because he understood the implications – the possible consequences of having built it – and for Nathan that's exactly the same. He can't stop himself doing it because he's so fascinated with the science, but he's incredibly disturbed."



Nathan Bateman (Oscar Isaac) is a billionaire and a recluse with a brilliant mind and a genius idea.



When robots become self-aware, is it wrong to kill them?



GARLAND JUDGES DREDD 2

ALEX GARLAND WEIGHS UP A DREDD SEQUEL'S CHANCES

It feels like the fan campaign for *Dredd 2* is gaining momentum, but it's hard to lose sight of the fact that the first film, as brilliant as it was, was a box-office flop.

The filmmakers have been careful, and Garland is extremely pragmatic about it. "The stuff surrounding *Dredd* is all to do with realpolitik and the hard realities of filmmaking. And it's very difficult making a case for *Dredd* in reality, because the first film [Danny Cannon's 1995 *Judge Dredd*] didn't work, right? Then the second film didn't work in, I would say, different ways than the first film didn't work [laughs], but

it manifestly didn't work as a theatrical release anywhere outside the UK.

"DVD sales are all very well, but you are still talking to people about handing over a lot of money for a film that's happened twice and not worked on their terms either time. I suspect that the character has too many positives to be abandoned forever, but it's going to be someone else at some future point who restarts it.

"So in other words, what our relationship was with the previous film, someone else will have a relationship with our film, it will be a different group of people at a different point. That's what I suspect will happen."

Tortured scientists facing questions of responsibility, life and power has been something of a theme in Garland's work, and it's a recurrence that he's very comfortable with. "I like scientists. I've never felt about science the way people broadly feel about science, which is a) that it's dry, b) that it thinks that it has all the answers, and c) that it lacks poetry, and I've never seen that. The things that I find most moving are often to do with science. The scale of the universe, the long term future of man, the fact that we exist at all – they're all related to science, I find them really fascinating and I can't get away from them. And also, like, why not? Fucking action heroes. There's enough alpha males."

He's certainly not worried about being classified as a science fiction writer. "I've written sci-fi and I've written non-sci-fi... It's just stories," he explains. "I don't see that adult drama and genre are mutually exclusive. Which is sometimes the way it's seen, like you're either Ken Loach or you're Michael Bay, right? And of course that's a load of crap, and there's lots of people demonstrating that that's crap. I'd put myself in the group of people who don't pay any attention. I don't think of myself as a sci-fi writer; I just see myself as a writer who loves sci-fi." 

Ex Machina will be released in UK cinemas on 23 January 2015.

25 YEARS AFTER BATMAN,
MICHAEL KEATON FINALLY GETS
BACK INTO THE SUPER SUIT –
WELL, KIND OF. WE TALK TO THE
CAST AND CREW OF NEXT YEAR'S
UNEXPECTED SUPER HIT...

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF BIRDMAN

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER INTERVIEWS POPPY-JAY PALMER,
JONATHAN HATFULL, JULIDE TANRIVERDI



BIRDMAN IS UNLIKE ANYTHING YOU'VE SEEN BEFORE. THAT SOUNDS LIKE A GRAND STATEMENT, BUT IT'S TRUE. IT'S A SUPERHERO MOVIE THAT ISN'T a superhero movie, and a brilliantly dark comedy that should come with a large existential crisis warning label. It doesn't make sense, but it also somehow does.

It's a smart, slick and thoughtful film about the human condition that also slays with gags involving birdcalls and budgie smugglers, and punchlines like "smells like balls". But the combination appears to be a winning one, as it has been commended by critics everywhere since its US release in October.

Unbelievably, *Birdman* is acclaimed director Alejandro González Iñárritu's first venture into comedy. His previous features – *Amores Perros*, *21 Grams*, *Babel* and *Biutiful* – were all well received, but they were also pretty heavy on drama, so comedy was almost entirely uncharted territory for the filmmaker. As if only to make the project even more difficult, Iñárritu decided that he wanted to make the film look like it was one long, continuous shot.

The idea was an ambitious one, and posed a fair few logistical issues for the crew, but they believe it ultimately paid off. Nicholas Giacobone, one of the film's writers, says Iñárritu jumped into the project with both feet.

"The first ideas for *Birdman* were more about form than story," says Giacobone. "The first thing he told us was that he wanted to do a comedy in one continuous shot, and that he wanted to use just one location and follow the main character along this fixed location. And he thought that the location could be a Broadway theatre. Those were the first clues he gave us for this new film, which was very confusing for us coming from *Biutiful* (Iñárritu, Giacobone and *Birdman* writer Armando Bo's first collaboration). Imagine, Alejandro wanted to do a comedy in one shot, everything sounded like this huge, strange – I will not say 'mistake', because it was very intriguing – but if you think of a comedy and you think of one-shot narration, they are even like a contradiction in themselves. But it was more about that: more about form than story."

The concept was even more difficult to execute from a technical angle, as the crew constantly had to find ways of getting around problems with timing and space. "At the beginning it was frightening for me, hoping it would make sense, because I knew that everything I put on the page it was going ➤

➔ to be there at the end on screen," says Giacobone. "We had to be very careful about the importance of each word on the page, and also it was very difficult to develop the transitions between scenes, how to keep the pace forward, how to avoid dragging those sort of moments where nothing is happening, have the story move forward. I mean, the whole *Birdman* thing was very scary for us at the beginning with the screenplay, and also for the actors, because they were doing eight-minute shots and takes, and if you ruin one line then you will ruin half an hour of work... I would say that we sort of learnt how to make this movie while we were doing it – which is not the right way to do things, but when it works it can be fascinating."

Production designer Kevin Thompson says: "For me, it was like Alejandro's plan from the beginning was to make the movie appear like it was filmed in that one continuous shot. That led to a lot of technical challenges and required us to invent things spontaneously on set so we could change the movement of the camera. We abandoned certain traditional methods of designing a back-stage set, and we left the set to organically grow around the action of the movie."



"For example, we would make the corridors the length they needed to be for a certain dialogue scene, and the speed that the actors walked. Then where they would stop and have a conversation, we created an area that had more interesting backgrounds and things like that. So the set itself evolved from the action of the rehearsals and the ability for the camera to move where it needed to move to shoot it, which we didn't really know until the last minute sometimes. Even on the day of shooting we'd be changing the set around and moving things."

TAKING ON HIS FIRST LEADING ROLE IN YEARS, MICHAEL KEATON PLAYS RIGGAN THOMSON, AN AGING ACTOR ON A MEANDERING ROAD LEADING TO A

full-blown mental breakdown. When we first meet Riggan, he's at the start of that road and beginning to feel like nothing really matters. He starred in the multi-billion dollar *Birdman* franchise 20 years ago, but since flying under the radar as an actor for a while, people are already forgetting him.

The broad comparisons between the former Batman and his character are less than subtle, and a stream of

superhero jokes follow at Keaton's expense. But if there ever was a victorious comeback, Keaton's is it. *Birdman* has so far only been released in the US and Mexico, but there's already a lot of awards buzz surrounding both him and the film.

Screenwriter Armando Bo is filled with praise for the actor. "I think he has something that is almost magical in a way," he tells us. "What's magical is that when you see this movie you can't imagine anybody else. I think that he's an amazing actor. People love him, so it's really positive for the movie, and I can't see this movie with another actor. I can't imagine it. It plays with reality, what is real, what is not, and I think he makes that really, really powerful... Alejandro made a great choice, and now I see that he was the only one."

"[Keaton] was incredibly professional and hard-working, and physically on his game," Thompson agrees. "He was so impressive, because these actors really went through tests, doing these long, long scenes without the crutch of knowing that they could freshen their makeup for the close-up. With these actors it was such a combination of doing a theatre piece and doing a movie. He was incredibly impressive – a really

Being Alejandro González Iñárritu

The director tells us why *Birdman* may be his most personal movie

"Basically, [*Birdman*] came from this struggle and battle that we all have with our ego. In this case, in a personal battle... I have just turned 50 last year. It's just that when you realise... you make kind of a revision of the priorities that you have been dealing with in your life. And some things are missing, some things are great, and some things are not so great. I have been just going in through retrospection about how the mechanics of my own perception have been."

"I thought it was incredibly interesting what I have been learning to be aware of how the ego can work. In my case, in the creative process my ego has always been a huge inquisitor, a tyrant kind of dictator that is very rude and sometimes can be very misleading. Because sometimes when I'm doing something I say, 'Oh, this is great, this is fantastic! You're a genius!' And then 20 minutes later I feel like a dead jellyfish and I say, 'You are stupid asshole. What you think is piece of shit. Nobody will care about it.' So it's a constant bipolar relation of my process that I thought 'Well, the ego is a tyrant,' and I thought it would be a cool thing to portray in a film."

Michael Keaton takes the lead as washed-up actor Riggan Thomson.



brilliant sort of equalitarian with the crew and respectful of everybody. He has very little ego, and he worked like a stealth actor. I was really impressed with him. I thought he was fantastic."

The long-shot style sometimes caused the actors to have to perform up to 15 pages of dialogue in one go while also hitting choreographed marks. It could get quite complicated for all involved at times.

"The character is really one of the most difficult things I've done," says Keaton.

"Not in terms of the character necessarily, but in terms of how the film was made... Within sometimes 30 or 40 seconds, you have to surf a lot of different emotions and be part of this giant picture. Because this picture is always shifting and moving, it's got so many levels. So therefore it was really, really difficult, but I like that."

The symmetry between Keaton and Riggan's career is apparent, but strangely, Keaton has said that the character was the most unlike himself than any he has ever played.

BECAUSE THIS PICTURE IS ALWAYS SHIFTING AND MOVING IT'S GOT SO MANY LEVELS
MICHAEL KEATON

"I think he made the character his own, and it was just fantastic to see him turn into Riggan, which is crazy because the main character has nothing to do with him, personality wise," Giacobone tells us. "They just share this sort of past, this superhero past, but the work he did was just fantastic. I mean, I am so happy that he's the one doing it, because every time I see him I'm

amazed. It was a crazy thing to do, it was a very intense journey, but at the same time the way it was shot [made it] very difficult."

The main themes explored

by *Birdman* include ego and existence, which seems pretty bleak subject matter for a superhero-based comedy, but the filmmakers drew from their own experiences in order to make a convincing case.

"It's fascinating because it's us," Giacobone tells us. "It's going back and forth over time between, 'What I'm doing is something great and meaningful', and then suddenly the same thing is just, 'Who cares? Who needs another movie?'

Who needs another book?' I mean, it's just meaningless, so it's this constant fight... That's why you need to have this sort of capacity of ignorance in a sense, because at one point you just have to let go and do it if you're meant to do it, and there is no true justification for it. It's just an urge, a personal urge, or something like that."

Though the title and the basic plot suggests otherwise, *Birdman* – though still about a superhero – isn't a superhero movie. The super suits and powers are buried under mountains of angst, satire, self-evaluation and artistic filming techniques.

Edward Norton, who stars opposite Keaton, and is no stranger to the superhero movie, having been Marvel's Hulk before Mark Ruffalo took the reins, says: "Michael [Keaton] and I went over to New York Comic-Con to do a panel. Right before we went on, I looked at Michael and said, 'Do you think this is the ultimate bait-and-switch that's ever been pulled on a Comic-Con audience? Can you imagine if you go to this actually thinking it's a superhero movie?'"



Birdman will be released in cinemas on 1 January 2015.

Emma Stone also features as Riggan's recovering drug-addict daughter Sam.



Edward Norton stars alongside Keaton as Broadway actor Mike.

Director of Photography Emmanuel Lubezki with Alejandro González Iñárritu and Keaton.



The parallels between Birdman and Keaton's Batman are clear from the off.

Superhero stage shows

Birdman isn't the first vigilante to take to the stage

SPIDER-MAN: TURN OFF THE DARK
Music and lyrics by Bono and The Edge, book by Julie Taymor, Glen Berger and Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa

This ambitious *Spider-Man* show contained highly technical stunts and aerial combat scenes. It's no surprise that it holds the record for the most expensive Broadway production in history. It made a fair bit of money but reviews we mixed, and the show's run concluded at the start of 2014. It featured songs called *A Boy Falls From The Sky* and *A Freak Like Me (Needs Company)*.



IT'S A BIRD... IT'S A PLANE... IT'S SUPERMAN

Music by Charles Strouse, lyrics by Lee Adams, book by David Newman and Robert Benton

This stage show starring the Man of Steel started its debut run on Broadway in 1966. It has since been performed in New York, Dallas and LA, and scored its own ABC TV special in 1975. Musical numbers include *It's Superman, Pow! Bam! Zonk!* and *It's Superman (Reprise)*.



HOLY MUSICAL B@MAN!

Music by Nick Gage and Scott Lamps, lyrics by Nick Gage, book by Nick Lang and Matt Lang

In this lively Mickey-take of the superhero genre, Batman sets out to make a super friend when he realises fighting crime is no fun when you're alone. It was created and performed by the stage troupe Starkid, who are also known for their hit Harry Potter shows, *A Very Potter Musical* which starred *Glee*'s Darren Criss as Harry Potter.



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GET CARTER

SPINNING OUT OF HER APPEARANCE [REDACTED] IN CAPTAIN AMERICA: THE [REDACTED] FIRST AVENGER AND HER SUCCESSFUL ONE-SHOT, AGENT PEGGY CARTER IS HEADLINING HER [REDACTED] OWN EIGHT-EPIISODE EVENT SERIES. WE TALK TO [REDACTED] THE AGENT HERSELF – ACTRESS [REDACTED] HAYLEY ATWELL – AND THE SERIES' PRODUCERS ABOUT BREAKING OUT INTO MARVEL'S BIGGER WORLD...

WORDS EDWARD GROSS

ONE OF THE MORE INTRIGUING ASPECTS OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE BEING SO INTRICATELY TIED TOGETHER IS THE OPPORTUNITY IT PROVIDES FOR

characters to resonate in ways that no one could have imagined in the beginning. That's what happened with Clark Gregg's Agent Phil Coulson, and it's definitely happening with Hayley Atwell's Agent Peggy Carter.

[REDACTED] After making her debut in *Captain America: The First Avenger*, then reprising the character in a one-shot short and appearing one more time as an elderly incarnation in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, Atwell is front and centre in the eight-episode *Agent Carter* series. Taking place in 1946, it focuses on Carter as she balances the routine of office work for the Strategic Scientific Reserve while secretly assisting Howard Stark (Dominic Cooper), who finds himself falsely accused of supplying deadly weapons to the top bidder. She's assisted by Stark's butler, Edwin Jarvis (James D'Arcy), in finding those responsible and disposing of the weapons.

In tracing the genesis of the series, executive producer Louis D'Esposito says, "We're all about telling good stories. We wanted to do a one-shot, and we wanted to go back and do something with Hayley Atwell as Peggy Carter, because Peggy is one of the only people from the first *Captain*

America film that didn't end up frozen in ice or have any experimentation done to them. So we said, 'Let's go back to 1946, pick up where we left off, and get a little glimpse into the life of Peggy Carter.'

"When you have an actress like Hayley," he continues, "who is so committed to the role, and so wonderful, after the short was completed we went back and showed the people at Disney, and they recognised what we had was special. They're the ones who said, 'We should make this a television show.' That's why we're here."

Stephen McFeely, [REDACTED] who along with writing partner Christopher Markus penned both *Captain America* films and serves as executive producer of the series, enthuses, "I need this on my TV. I need a strong, complicated, regular woman kicking ass and asking questions. I'm thrilled about it."

[REDACTED] "I'm really glad it's her," notes Markus. "When we originally wrote the character, she was just this person called 'Agent Carter'. But then Hayley Atwell got cast, and Carter became English, and we had a lot more questions about her after the movie was over than we had answers. We had the 98-year-old Peggy in *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, but we wondered what the hell happened in ➤

MUST-SEE TV

Agent Carter



➤ between those two points. To be handed this opportunity is a lot of fun.”

The 1946 setting is appealing to the writing/producing staff, with executive producer Chris Dingess pointing out that an important aspect is dealing with a woman in a time period where the men are coming

home from war and women are being marginalised after they had been such strong participants in the war effort. “They’re being ignored,” he says, “but here you have this strong female character who helped fight the Nazis and now she’s being marginalised. At the same time, she’s someone who has a quiet confidence and an ability to get the mission done. That’s what draws me to her.”

Executive producer Michele Fazekas admits that she found it interesting that the network was willing to do a period piece – something they had not really been fond of doing. “I also feel you could tell this story in any time period, because it’s a spy story; it’s action and adventure. What I love about doing something that’s taking place in the Forties is exploring all the gender politics and having the wardrobe and the cars of the era. We also feel it’s great telling a story where cell phones don’t exist. [Writer] Tara [Butters] and I worked on *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit* for five years, and you found yourself setting up situations where they don’t have phone

service or the battery is about to die. From a writer’s perspective, it’s nice not to have cellphones or the technology we have and the challenges that presents. Yet, because it’s Marvel you can also play with Howard Stark’s technology and how he has things that are almost supernatural in their abilities. So you can play both sides of that.”

“I would add that I think it’s fun to take a character who we’ve seen come to life in the movies and expand on that,” muses Butters, who is also an executive producer on the show. “In a two-hour movie the time you spend with Peggy Carter is limited, except that she pops in every scene she’s in. But we get to explore her character in a way that you can only do

on television, because whether it’s eight episodes, 13 or 22, the amount of time you spend with a character on television should really allow you to get to know them. It’s the reason why fans actually feel like they know the actors that play their favourite TV characters more than they do, say, Brad Pitt, because they’ve welcomed them into their home every week.”

As previously noted, *Agent Carter* is an eight-episode ‘event’ series, which was something the various executive producers really pushed for. “We lobbied really hard for this,” says McFeely. “We love the cable model. There’s a place for the 22-episode show, but my heart is with the short show

Hayley Atwell returns as the kick-ass Peggy Carter for this limited series.



AGENT CARTER SPEAKS

Hayley Atwell on surviving in a superhero’s world

Catching Hayley Atwell with a bit of free time during production of *Agent Carter* is not as easy as it would seem, particularly considering that unlike the Marvel films she’s appeared in, in this show she’s front and centre pretty much all the time. Still, in one of those rare moments, she’s more than happy to sit down with us and reflect on what she hopes the show will provide her a chance to do.

What opportunity do you feel the series provides to expand the audience’s view of Peggy Carter beyond her previous appearances? I think the main thing is fans feel that they’ve seen her being capable, being sexy and being a femme fatale, and they want to see something more. They

want to see the complexities, the three dimensions of her, what makes her tick, what makes her crumble, what makes her crash and the limitations of who she is, because that makes her all the more relatable.

It would seem that having eight episodes will, if you’ll pardon the cliché, allow the viewer to peel back the layers of who she really is.

I think over the arc of the right episodes there will be very different facets to who she is, which won’t disappoint the fans in making sure that she has a story within herself, as well as the stories of each episode fighting who she fights against and still battling her own demons – including losing the love of her life – and what a personal cost to

her that is. There’s many different ideas behind who she is, and I think she’s going to become more interesting.

As a ‘normal’ human in a world of superheroes, how much action are we going to see in *Agent Carter*?

It’s going to be very physical. There’s going to be a lot of action involved in it, so that in itself means it will take a lot of stamina to film the show in a very short space of time. So I’ve begun a lot of strength training and physical training, my diet... my whole life has been turned upside down, with the focus on making sure that she’s believable. It’s a great chance to become really fit and healthy for something that’s so exciting and so great. These are really exciting challenges for me.

Carter has also shown up in flashback form in Season Two of *Agents Of SHIELD*.



AGENT CARTER

Get Carter



where it's one story that is told well over very few episodes."

Notes Markus, "We really wanted to be an event – and not an episode-of-the-week – case solved by 9:50 situation. We want to tell an eight-hour movie."

"Having eight episodes," says Butters, "allows us to really craft it. The shorter series really allows you to make sure that you're creating an intricate plot that's fun to watch unfold."

Directing brothers Joe and Anthony Russo, who helmed *The Winter Soldier*, are returning for *Captain America: Civil War*, and are directing the first two episodes of the series, were big proponents of the shorter season format, having had plenty of television in their background.

"We've been saying this for years," says Anthony, "because working in network television it's so hard to deliver that many episodes; it's brutal – especially with a show that has an ambitious production dimension to it. It's crushing. The shorter season makes it easier to execute with a high concept."

"High concept," elaborates Joe, "only sustains a certain amount of episodes. Then you just start treading water. So then you just reach a point where you're like, 'Okay, 14 of our episodes are gonna be great and eight are gonna be fine,' because you just can't fill 22 episodes of high concept. Eight episodes is great because it's a period show, and so it allows them to have a larger

budget. Eight's the right number; it's an eight-hour movie."

It's a 'movie' that also serves the purpose of helping to add to the foundation of the Marvel universe. "In some ways it's world-building," says Fazekas. "A show like *Game Of Thrones*, for instance is one where that world is being built. We kind of approach this show in the same way. We're helping to build a world, but it's a world of the past that also has a modern sensibility in some ways. Right before we started on the show, I happened to catch *LA*

Confidential on TV.

Even though that's about ten years after we take place, I thought they did such a great

job of creating that world, but it doesn't feel old-fashioned. And that's one of the brilliant things about the *Agent Carter* one-shot: you're in the Forties, but it feels contemporary. Our goal is to make this feel like a modern show that happens to be taking place in 1946."

Closes Butters, "The fun thing about the show for us is that it harkens back to some of the movies that we grew up on, like *Indiana Jones*, where there's comedy and action and suspense. It kind of touches on a number of different genres, and at the same time we get to help shape that era of the Marvel universe."

Agent Carter will air on ABC on 6 January in the US, with a UK broadcast to follow.

CALLING AGENT CARTER

Joe Johnston on what made Hayley Atwell the perfect SHIELD agent

Hayley Atwell made her debut as Peggy Carter in 2011's *Captain America: The First Avenger*. On paper, the character could have easily been little more than a peripheral element in Steve Rogers' story. But Atwell was more than that, bringing a depth to each of her scenes. This, as that film's director, Joe Johnston, explains it, is exactly what she brought to the table from the off.

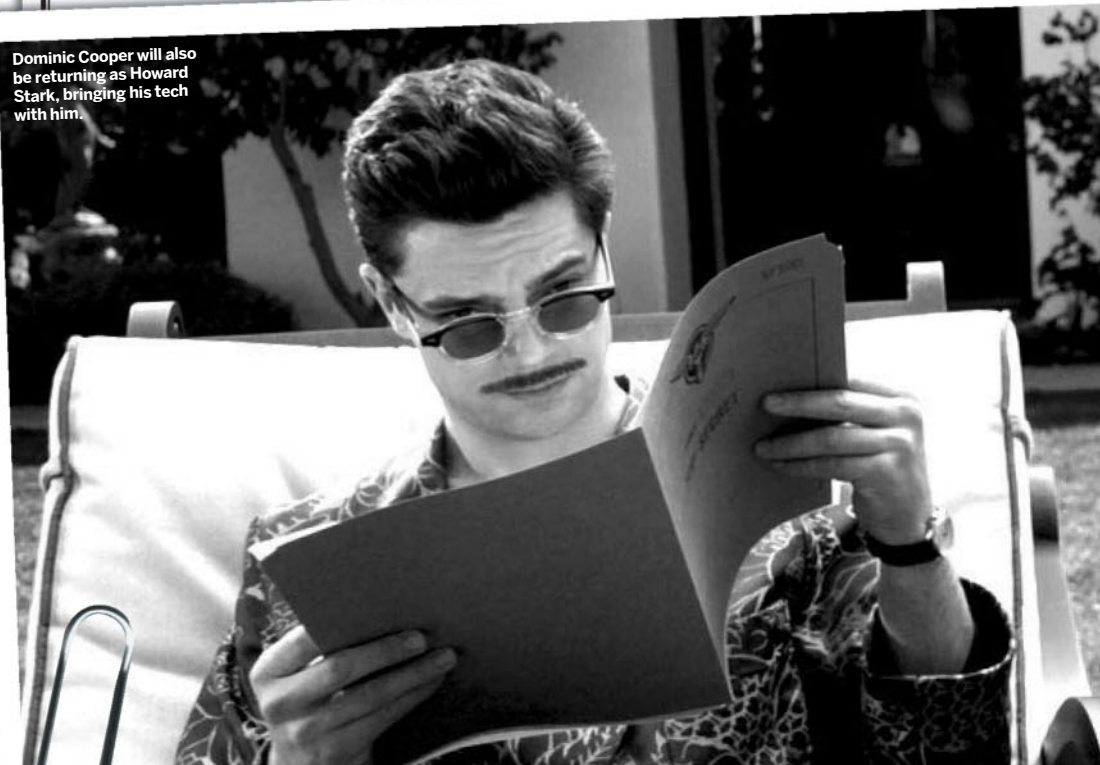
Says Atwell, "Something Joe talked about early on was that he wanted to root these characters in reality. If you

portray them as human beings, then the audience can relate a bit more than sending them up or making it a caricature or cartoony. It was important to Joe, and it was important to me as an actor that it's rooted in something real."

"Hayley got the part," adds Johnston, "because she came in for a screen test and had the crew in tears with the radio message to Steve as he's piloting the bomber into the ice. To top it off, she's smart, athletic, tough and resourceful, both as Peggy and as Hayley."



Dominic Cooper will also be returning as Howard Stark, bringing his tech with him.





MOTHER OF FEARS

SCIFINOW GOES BACK TO EEL MARSH HOUSE TO MEET THE WOMAN IN BLACK ON THE SET OF HAMMER HORROR'S BIGGEST SEQUEL...

WORDS
JONATHAN HATFULL

WE ALL KNOW THE WAY TO EEL MARSH HOUSE; YOU NEED TO GET OVER THE CAUSEWAY BEFORE THE TIDE COMES IN. ONCE YOU'RE THERE, THERE'S A

12-hour wait before you can leave. So it's just you, an unnerving selection of children's toys, a rocking chair and the Woman in Black. Fortunately, this is not the case on a grey December morning, as **SciFiNow** is shepherded through the legendary Pinewood Studios, resisting the urge to run off and hunt for *Star Wars* clues. We're here for *The Woman in Black: Angel Of Death*; Hammer's sequel to their massive box-office hit, and Eel Marsh House has been rebuilt on one of these historic stages.

However, this isn't Eel Marsh House as you remember it; this is Eel Marsh House 40 years later, and it's very nearly derelict. The paint on the walls is damp and fading, floorboards have rotted away, dead leaves are scattered about the floor, and there are legions of dead flies everywhere. Still, some things haven't changed. As we climb the staircase and walk down the corridor towards the nursery, we can't help looking behind us, just in case.

"Do you know, it's actually quite nice in comparison to some of the other places that we've filmed!" laughs star Phoebe Fox, joining us for a cup of tea and a biscuit in a decidedly cosier and probably less haunted boardroom. "Like the cellar, which we filmed in a place called The House of Detention in Clerkenwell, which is a prison from the 19th Century where they used to lock up children, and is apparently one of the most haunted places in London. That was pretty grim, and really quite scary,

especially as Tom [Harper, director] made us rehearse in the dark. I scare quite easily in life, so this is quite joyful. It's well lit, it's not damp, it's not cold; it's lovely actually."

Fox plays Eve Parkins, one of two teachers entrusted with looking after a group of orphans evacuated from the Blitz who are sent to Eel Marsh House. Once there, Eve soon realises that something isn't right about the place, as the ghost of Jennet Humfrye soon sets about her wicked business. Can she convince her stern colleague Jean (Helen McCrory) and a kindly airman Harry (Jeremy Irvine) that they

need to get out before it's too late? "It's a whole new set of characters; it's a whole different time period, so it's what happens to this new set of characters and what happens to the Woman in Black," explains writer Jon Croker. "The next chapter."

We get a glimpse of these new characters as we're rushed behind a bank of monitors to watch one of the early scenes being filmed, and *Peaky Blinders* star McCrory marshals her young charges during the bus ride to their final destination. While the first film was about Daniel Radcliffe's Arthur Kipps facing the ghostly menace alone,

The sequel stars *War Horse's* Jeremy Irvine and *The Hollow Crown's* Phoebe Fox.



➤ this sequel raises the ante by not only filling the house, but doing so with children. We have a spooky manor, an unquiet spirit and a strong woman protecting a group of orphans in a World War II setting, so it's not a surprise when Croker points to Spanish ghost stories as an inspiration.

"Absolutely," he agrees. "They feel like classic English ghost stories, especially *The Orphanage* and *The Devil's Backbone*, because they're wartime ghost stories as well, so they were really good touchstones. And also nicely different enough so you don't go 'Oh, I'll just copy that outright.'"

Perhaps the most important inspiration came from Susan Hill. The author of the original novella is credited for the essential premise of this sequel. "I approached her to say, 'Had you ever thought about writing another story about the Woman in Black: what happens next?'" remembers Hammer's CEO Simon Oakes. "She did say that she had thought about it, but had always dismissed it. As a novelist, she didn't want to create a long-running saga. She saw these disused airbases from the Second World War, and she thought about the ghosts of airmen past, and then thought about Eel Marsh House being reopened during the Second World War. It's terrific to have her as part of it; it gives it a legitimacy."

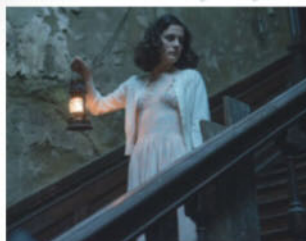
Having successfully pitched his take on Hill's outline, Croker went to meet the legendary author. "It was intimidating!" he laughs. "Fortunately she's really nice. I felt a huge weight of responsibility, and she had every right to be really horrible to me if she wanted, but she wasn't! She was very kind."

Indeed, a genial atmosphere seems to be the theme on the set. Despite the fact that they're working on a World War II-set horror film, the cast and crew seem happy to report that everything is running very smoothly, which *War Horse* star Jeremy Irvine attributes in part to the group of kids playing the sad little orphans. "You can't come into work grumpy. If you're having a rough day and you have all these kids, you can't be miserable. It's great, because I have one magic trick that I can do, and they think I'm Gandalf. I'm just having such a laugh: lots of hiding in cupboards and jumping out at that them and stuff. I'm not helping things on set, but yeah, really good fun."

It's not just the kids who have been subject to on-set scares, however. "Phoebe is too easy," Irvine laughs. "It's too much fun. But with Phoebe it almost feels like bullying. It's like picking on the vulnerable one; she's so easily scared that I feel a bit guilty. Tom has been brutal for that, like she has to run into a room and he'll be standing right behind the door. Tom claims to be ungettable, and we shall see. I think it's going to

ALL THE CHARACTERS HAVE THEIR OWN GHOSTS

JEREMY IRVINE



have to be off set. I might have to hide in the boot of his car."

Perhaps unsurprisingly given her past imposing roles, Helen McCrory tells us that no one's had the nerve to prank her. "I've got two days left," she smiles. "I do feel like Peter Sellers walking into the flat waiting for my Kato at any point, you know? So I'm slightly on edge, but it hasn't happened yet."

While Eve is of a kindly disposition, McCrory says her character is very much in the old tradition of strict teachers. "Absolutely," she stresses. "So in case you were in any vagueness about how you should think of my character, the surname is 'Hogg', Just to nail it to the cross. She is the archetypal stiff-upper-lip, sense of duty. She's a Brigadier's wife, and both her children are serving in the war, so although she's supposed to be the baddie in a way, I hope that there's some understanding for her. Not sympathy; I'm not interested in sympathy."

That depth of character is very much a recurring theme. "Reading it, I thought even if you took the horror element out of it this could still stand up as a film," enthuses Irvine. "You've still got characters who've all

got their own amazing back stories. I like to say that all the characters in this actually have their own ghosts."

"If you look at this last film, we raised the bar in terms of production values, design and the real quality of the production," Oakes tells us. "Very much character-driven, story-driven. I think that we believe that genre at the highest level is where you care about the characters. If you don't care about the characters and what happens to them, frankly those films get forgotten. The horror, suspense and terror is also at the heart of it, but it's character and storytelling."

Still, there's no escaping the weight of expectation on its release. "One of the things I like about filming is that you kind of take pressure off slightly because you don't have any time to worry," Harper tells us. "At the moment, I don't find it a pressure at all, because I'm so focused on achieving what I think is the best film we can make. But I'm sure come January I will be going through a lot of pressure!"

The Woman In Black: Angel Of Death will be released in UK cinemas on 1 January 2015.



Instead of one child, the sequel is home to many children.



'You let him go' reads the writing on the wall. It can't end well.



THE WOMAN IN BLACK: ANGEL OF DEATH

Mother Of Fears

THE ULTIMATE HAUNTED HOUSE

Try to survive the night in our terrifying place of residence...

The Woman In Black (2012)

Arthur Kipps can be forgiven for not knowing the story of The Woman in Black when he arrived at Eel Marsh House, but surely he knew better than to investigate the creepy nursery.

The Amityville Horror (1979)

It's easy to see why the Lutz family fell in love with this house; just look at those windows. Still, it's a shame about the burial ground, the devil worshipping and all the murders.

Paranormal Activity (2007)

Convinced you're being haunted but struggling with a sceptical partner? He'll change his tune when the camera he sets up shows you being dragged out the room by an evil spirit.

The Haunting (1963)

If you're sensitive to psychic energy then do avoid the library in Hill House. The spiral staircase can be ever so treacherous...

Thir13en Ghosts (2001)

Inheriting a mansion from your uncle might seem like a win, but there's the risk that he might have been harvesting evil spirits. Don't forget your special ghost-vision glasses!

Beetlejuice (1988)

Lydia Deetz has befriended the spirits of the Maitlands, and now she can air-dance to Harry Belafonte.

The Shining (1980)

The Overlook Hotel has plenty of rooms, so there's no excuse for going into Room 237, no matter how alluring the lady in the bathtub is.

The Others (2001)

Sprawling mansions are creepy enough without your children living in darkness due to a skin condition.

Session 9 (2001)

Removing asbestos from an abandoned asylum is a hell of a task, so naturally it puts a lot of strain on old Gordon. Waking up Simon, however, is an unforgivable error.

House (1977)

A getaway with your friends to visit your aunt might seem like a good idea unless she's a vengeful spirit who consumes unmarried girls.

The Orphanage (2007)

Re-opening an abandoned orphanage is a noble thing to do, but you are going to have to expect one or two unquiet spirits. They might be closer than you think...

Poltergeist (1982)

If you agree to live in a planned community, make sure the developers haven't desecrated the Native American burial ground, or your daughter might be taken to another dimension.

The Devil's Backbone (2001)

Just in case you were in any doubt about the explosive potential of living in a haunted orphanage, there's an unexploded bomb to remind you.

The Innkeepers (2011)

The Yankee Peddler Inn is haunted, so we can't stress strongly enough that you mustn't go into the basement. We tried to warn you.

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SciFiNow Reviews

Our thoughts on the pick
of the entertainment
releases out this month

★★★★★ Outstanding ★★★★★ Thoroughly entertaining ★★★ Good but somewhat lacking ★★ Fair at best ★ Avoid as you should *Ultra Warrior*

76 CINEMA Theatrical releases

76 Birdman (Or The
Unexpected Virtue Of
Ignorance)

77 The Hunger
Games: Mockingjay -
Part 1

77 The Woman In
Black: Angel Of Death

79 Big Hero 6

80 HOME/FILM Films on DVD, Blu-ray and more

80 The Hayao
Miyazaki Collection

81 The Green Mile:
15th Anniversary
Edition

81 Hercules

81 The Congress

82 Stanley Kubrick:
The Masterpiece
Collection

82 The Guest

82 The Toxic Avenger:
Part II

83 Gremlins

83 Dawn Of The
Planet Of The Apes

83 The Hobbit: The
Desolation Of Smaug
- Extended Edition

84 HOME/TV/ AUDIO

TV shows on DVD,
Blu-ray and more

84 Doctor Who: The
Complete Series Eight

84 The Strain:
Season One

85 Battlestar
Galactica: The
Complete Series

85 Star Trek: The Next
Generation -
Season Seven



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TO REVIEWS THAT SCORE FOUR STARS OR MORE...

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76 BIRDMAN

"BUCKETS OF MAGIC AND FUN"

TRIVIA BIRDMAN REPRESENTS MICHAEL KEATON'S FIRST LEADING ROLE IN SIX YEARS.

FILM INFO

Released

2 January 2015

Certificate

15

Director

Alejandro González Iñárritu

Screenwriters

Alejandro González Iñárritu, Nicolás Giacobone, Alexander Dinelaris, Armando Bo

Cast

Michael Keaton, Zach Galifianakis, Edward Norton, Andrea Riseborough, Amy Ryan, Emma Stone, Naomi Watts

Distributor

Fox Searchlight Pictures

Running Time

119 mins



BIRDMAN, OR (THE UNEXPECTED VIRTUE OF IGNORANCE)

Is it a Birdman?
Is it a plane?

THE SUPERMETA

Oddball superhero movies

The Specialists (2000)

The world's sixth or seventh best superhero team juggle saving lives with marketing their merchandise.

Kick-Ass (2010)

After injuries leave him with faulty pain receptors, Dave Lizewski becomes a superhero.

Watchmen (2009)

Features some 'superheroes' you certainly wouldn't want to meet in a dark alley, like Jeffrey Dean Morgan's Comedian.

Super (2010)

Rainn Wilson plays a man with good intentions but no skill in this comedy, written and directed by James Gunn.

Hancock (2008)

Will Smith literally goes from having nothing to saving the world.

Irony is not lost on *Birdman*. Michael Keaton plays Riggan Thomson, a washed-up former Hollywood actor, pin-up and household name thanks to a multi-billion-dollar superhero franchise. He was Birdman, and everybody loved him. 20 years later he's broke, and resorts to directing, writing and starring in a Broadway play as part of an attempted comeback.

Throughout, it feels like *Birdman* is simultaneously saluting the superhero genre and ripping it apart. There's the eternal running joke about Keaton and Batman, meta references to actors from the Marvel Cinematic Universe like Robert Downey Jr and Jeremy Renner, and appearances from such past Marvel aficionados as Edward Norton and Emma Stone, during which it retains the sense of wonder and excitement you get from the best superhero movies. As a satire it's critical and darkly cynical, but that's all buried beneath buckets of magic and fun.

As a piece of art – which is what it is – it's stunning. The amount and quality of

craftsmanship that has gone into it is astounding. Whether or not you like the actors, the characters or the story, *Birdman* is a triumph. The combination of Alejandro González Iñárritu's direction and Emmanuel Lubezki's cinematography is of the highest order. Most of the film was filmed to look like one long, continuous shot, in the tradition of the likes of Alfred Hitchcock's *Rope*. Of course, it's not one shot – that would have been next to impossible, what with some of it being set in Times Square and the story taking place over several days – but the end result feels just as seamless.

Likewise, the score is phenomenal. The camera follows Riggan through the winding corridors and deepest bowels of New York's St James Theatre like we are walking with him. All the while, Antonio Sánchez's strut-inducing jazz drumming plays over the picture. It really gets under the skin, being simple but powerful, and has all the subtlety of an ambulance siren. If everyone had that playing as the soundtrack to their lives then the world would be a much better place.

Everything else – the sets, the lighting, the costumes (Birdman's super-suit in particular) – is perfectly executed, and comes together to make a film so deliciously crafted that you'll likely be salivating just watching it. It is clear that

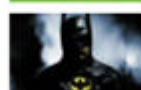
a huge amount of hard work and talent went into *Birdman*, which very obviously paid off.

It there's any justice in the film industry, Keaton should pretty much have his Academy Award nomination in the bag. Watching him play off the rest of the cast is engaging and entertaining, but he also transfers those qualities to an empty room when he's acting by himself, which happens alarmingly often. The first time we see him, he's sat in thin air in his pants, levitating, just chilling out and getting ready for rehearsals for his play – a stage adaptation of Raymond Carver's *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*. Though not much happens in those first couple of minutes – besides inexplicable levitation – it proves near-impossible not to stick with Riggan and root for him for the duration.

Iñárritu set out to make a great film, and achieves what Riggan Thomson had been aiming for his whole life. *Birdman* may not change the word, but people aren't going to forget about it.

Poppy-Jay Palmer
VERDICT ★★★★★

OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



Batman

Watching Michael Keaton as Bruce Wayne adds even more hilarity to the immense meta-textual references in *Birdman*.





THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY - PART 1

Playing with fire

Details 12A // 123 mins // Out now **Director** Francis Lawrence **Screenwriters** Danny Strong, Peter Craig **Cast** Jennifer Lawrence, Josh Hutcherson, Liam Hemsworth, Philip Seymour Hoffman, Julianne Moore **Distributor** Lionsgate



After the first two films took place mainly in the arenas, it's hard not to feel a certain sense of apprehension with *Mockingjay* -

Part 1, which isn't set in an arena at all. Thankfully, the odds were in *Mockingjay's* favour. When you are in it for the long haul, you end up watching for the characters.

The 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' rule doesn't apply to the arena, it seems, as the stunt with the arrow in *Catching Fire* cost Katniss (Jennifer Lawrence) her home, her district and countless lives. One woman's arrow is another woman's revolution firestarter, and once again Katniss has all of Panem's attention. But adapting to life in the underground District 13 – once believed to be destroyed – isn't easy, especially when combined with Katniss's PTSD and the capture of Peeta Mellark (Josh Hutcherson).

On top of that, the district's president Alma Coin (Julianne Moore) and Gamemaker-turned-rebel Plutarch Heavensbee (the late Philip Seymour Hoffman) are trying to turn Katniss into the face of the rebellion – the Mockingjay – without success. But after finding out that Peeta (Josh Hutcherson) is still alive

in the Capitol, she agrees – on the condition that Peeta is rescued, along with the other tributes.

One of the things that makes the *Hunger Games* films feel like actual dystopian action movies rather than part of a teen sci-fi franchise is the fact that the cast can actually act. Lawrence yet again proves herself to be a worthy Oscar winner, but the rest of the cast are more than just stepping stones for the story to balance on. The big players like Hoffman and Woody Harrelson are reliably top-notch, but the younger cast members hold their own too. Hutcherson was good as Peeta The Lover-Boy Baker's Son in the first two films, but he steps up his game as Peeta The Piece In The Games here.

Katniss may not be watching her back in the arena anymore, but you'll still be on the edge of your seat. *The Hunger Games* is becoming the Katniss Everdeen of the YA arena; it just keeps on winning.

Poppy-Jay Palmer
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The 100
Teenagers killing each other while they try to survive isn't as niche a genre as you'd think.



THE WOMAN IN BLACK: ANGEL OF DEATH

Suffer the little children

Details 12A // 98 mins // 2 January 2015 **Director** Tom Harper **Screenwriter** Jon Croker **Cast** Phoebe Fox, Helen McCrory, Jeremy Irvine **Distributor** Entertainment One



Hammer's follow-up to their biggest success story of recent times comes with a certain degree of respectability to off-set cash-in concerns, as original author Susan Hill provided the basis for Tom Harper's World War II-set ghost story.

It's 40 years on from the first film, and teachers Eve Parkins (Phoebe Fox) and Jean Hogg (Helen McCrory) are taking a group of evacuees out of London to a house in the countryside. The house, of course, is Eel Marsh House, and their presence quickly awakens the unquiet spirit that lives there. As the Woman in Black begins to exert her force over the children, Eve must confront her own fears and dark secrets in order to save the lives of her charges.

At first glance, the film has a lot going for it: the already creepy Eel Marsh House gone to rot, a time period overflowing with emotional and physical trauma, and a group of evacuees being threatened by a spirit that specifically targets children. However, despite clearly drawing inspiration from the great Spanish ghost stories of the last decade like *The Devil's Backbone* and *The Orphanage* (as well as Alejandro Amenábar's *The Others*), *The Woman In Black: Angel Of Death* struggles to establish a clear identity of its own.

Harper is adept at building atmosphere, and Croker's script gives the characters a bit more depth than you might expect, but this suffers from one of the classic sequel weaknesses: that of going through the motions. While the scenes involving the children are well-acted and written, there are also sequences straight out of the horror playbook (hello, mad old blind man). The Woman in Black herself can't evolve as a character, so Eve goes through the same voyage of self-discovery that Daniel Radcliffe's Arthur Kipps did in the first film. Jeremy Irvine's performance as the damaged airman who latches onto Eve is fine, but the character has the annoying habit of arriving to allow plot to happen.

There are some redeeming features: a late sequence in which the characters must keep their eyes closed at all costs is genuinely scary, Fox is a strong lead, and McCrory is on good form as Eve's no-nonsense colleague. It's certainly not terrible, but it is distinctly unmemorable nonetheless.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



The Devil's Backbone
Guillermo del Toro's superb Spanish Civil War ghost story builds atmosphere masterfully.

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COMING SOON!
CAPTAIN AMERICA
AND SPIDER-MAN

HANDMADE
IN THE UK

FILM INFO

Released

30 January 2015

Certificate

PG

Directors

Don Hall, Chris Williams

Screenwriters

Jordan Roberts, Dan Gerson, Robert L Baird

Cast

Ryan Potter, Scott Adsit, Jamie Chung, Damon Wayans Jr, Genesis Rodriguez, TJ Miller

Distributor

Walt Disney Studios

Running Time

102 mins



BIG HERO 6

Science is great!

Big Hero 6 represents Disney's first animated venture into the Marvel comic-book universe. Through it all, it sticks closely to the superhero-movie formula, with the central robot character – a healthcare system named Baymax – proving to be an extremely lovable and funny presence whose slapstick motions and fish-out-of-water behaviour is nothing but endearing.

The comic-book series that this is based on was set in Japan, but here the action is transported to the city of 'San Fransokyo'. This backdrop looks marvellous: a bustling metropolis of the hilly terrain and trams associated with San Francisco mixed with the cherry blossoms and architecture of Japan.

We first meet 13-year-old Hiro Hamada (Ryan Potter) as he hustles an old-timer at what appears to be a more sophisticated version of *Robot Wars*. Just as he's caught red-handed, his older brother Tadashi (Daniel Henney), swoops in to rescue him.

Hiro, having already graduated from high school, is a bright spark with no direction. Tadashi takes him to the San Fransokyo

Institute of Technology and introduces him to his latest invention, Baymax (voiced wonderfully by Scott Adsit) and his colleagues. This motley crew are made up of Fred (TJ Miller), a science fanboy who resembles Shaggy from *Scooby-Doo*; Wasabi (Damon Wayans Jr), a muscly neat freak; the stylish Honey Lemon (Genesis Rodriguez) and cyclist GoGo Tamago (Jamie Chung). Hiro finds a new passion and enters a competition to win a scholarship at the college, but after an unexpected tragedy his life takes a different course.

It takes a bit too long to set up the central relationship between Hiro and Baymax, but when it arrives it plays out like the one between Frank Langella and his AI helper in Jake Schreier's *Robot & Frank*. Baymax serves only Hiro's best interests health-wise, though when Hiro reprograms the machine for his own bidding events take a turn for the *Short Circuit*-esque, which allows for amusing mayhem to ensue. Their developing

bond ensures emotional investment, and it's a very well-observed and touching relationship. The writers also twist the usual revenge narrative and turn it into a positive lesson for kids.

Unfortunately, visually and narratively, there are far too many influences and references crammed in, which results in an odd tone. The supervillain is a manga-inspired Kabuki masked presence who is genuinely scary, which jars with the *Pokémon*-style energy that is clearly appealing to a younger audience. There are also sprinkles of Studio Ghibli, *The Incredibles* and *The Iron Giant*, which renders this effort slightly imitative aside from the imaginative Baymax.

But saying all that, *Big Hero 6* does tackle its themes of loss and coming-of-age in an accessible way. At first, Baymax is unaware of the importance of mental health in humans, but the film does a great job of explaining the effects of grief, and even makes suggestions, such as "talking to friends" as a way to recover. In line with Disney's more progressive approach, none of women are damsels in distress – in fact, GoGo's catchphrase is "woman up!"

There's a lot to like in this bright, colourful and very sweet film, full of heart and keen to extol the upsides of technology. It's at its most poignant and engaging when it comes to family matters, but loses points on the superheroics front.

Katherine McLaughlin
VERDICT ★★☆☆☆

THE BIG QUESTIONS

Everything else there is to know about Hiro and co

There's the obligatory Marvel post-credits sting, of course, but is it worth waiting through the names for?

Absolutely! Someone makes an amusing cameo appearance.

What special powers does Baymax have?

At first the power to heal, but when Hiro updates him he gains the ability to roundhouse kick as good as Chuck Norris. His walking style is based on the movement of baby penguins, and materials found at Carnegie Mellon University inspired the creation of Baymax.

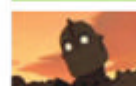


How emo is the musical montage accompaniment by Fall Out Boy?

Very.



OR STAY IN AND WATCH...



The Iron Giant

Brad Bird's less flashy and enchanting animation is about a boy who becomes friends with an alien robot.

FILM INFO

Certificate

12

Running Time

1,318 mins

Year made

Various

Director

Hayao Miyazaki

Cast

Various

Format

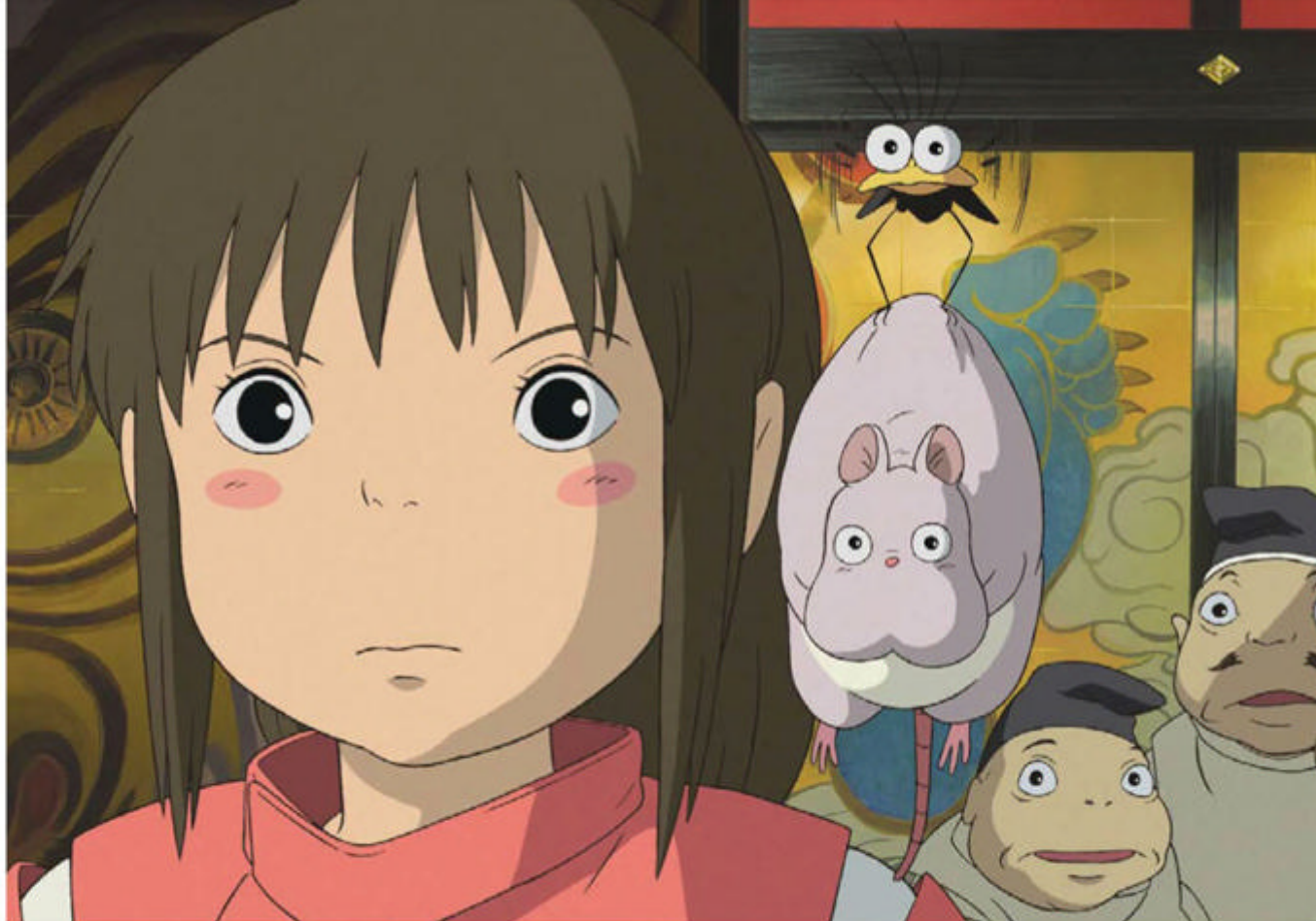


Released

Out now

Distributor

Studiocanal



THE HAYAO MIYAZAKI COLLECTION

Still the champ



WITHOUT HAYAO

Five of the best non-Miyazaki Ghibli films

Grave Of The Fireflies

This searing World War II drama is one of the most affecting animated films ever made.

Pom Poko

A tale of raccoons attempting to resist urban expansion, *Pom Poko* is an endearing oddball comedy.

Whisper Of The Heart

The only film directed by Yoshifumi Kondo before his tragically early death, this is a beautiful fantasy love story.

The Cat Returns

This odd romance sees a girl rescue a cat, only to find herself engaged to the Prince of the Cat Kingdom.

Arrietty

The Borrowers gets the Studio Ghibli treatment with wonderful results in this heart-warming adaptation.

You can't over-emphasise the importance of Hayao Miyazaki's work. While he is by no means the only creative force at Studio Ghibli, he is responsible for some of its finest films, as this collection proves.

The Castle Of Cagliostro (★★★★★) saw Miyazaki putting his own spin on the character of roguish thief Lupin, turning him into a loveable rascal and creating a hugely entertaining caper as our hero tries to save a princess from the titular fortress.

He adapted his own manga for *Nausicaa Of The Valley Of The Wind* (★★★★★), which shows him already depicting strong heroines and the importance of existing in harmony with nature to create a real emotional impact.

Laputa: Castle In The Sky (★★★★★) is more of an adventure story, as a boy and girl try to evade government agents to find the long-lost floating city of Laputa. It's a little overlong, but beautiful to look at, and the sky pirates are a fantastic bunch of scene-stealers.



My Neighbour Totoro (★★★★★) is Miyazaki's first masterpiece. The story (two girls encounter friendly forest spirits when they move to be nearer to their mother) is simple and more grounded than his previous works, but it's beautifully affecting, and *Totoro* is a wonder.

Kiki's Delivery Service (★★★★★) is more lively but no less heartfelt, as a young witch tries to make her way in the world without losing her natural spark.

Porco Rosso (★★★★★) was also set in Europe, with its between-wars tale of an Italian air-force pilot turned pirate hunter who is cursed to look like a pig. It's got a great noir atmosphere, is loaded with dry humour, and his love of flight is on display.

He then delivered a pair of masterpieces: *Princess Mononoke* (★★★★★) is an affecting fairy tale, as Prince Ashitaka tries to prevent others from destroying the forests and enraging the gods and spirits within. It's still surprisingly brutal in places, as the environmental message fiercely comes through alongside the beautifully created otherworldly elements.

Spirited Away (★★★★★) won an Oscar and brought Ghibli to the attention of the mainstream. It's still every bit as bewitching, as he plunges his young heroine into a bathhouse for spirits, opening the door to a world of strange creatures, dark surprises and wonder.

Howl's Moving Castle (★★★★★) is a slightly cluttered but visually stunning adaptation of Diana Wynne Jones' book, with a young hatmaker transformed into an old woman by a mean-spirited witch before taking up with the titular wizard. *Sofy* is one of the most winning of Ghibli's many brilliant heroes, while rounded characters and undertones of moral responsibility give it depth.

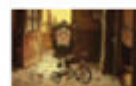
Ponyo (★★★★★) is a heart-warming tale of a young fish-girl who rebels against her father and goes to live with a young boy and his family. Unexpectedly affecting and beautifully created, it's an utter joy.

The box-set also includes Miyazaki's lovely farewell *The Wind Rises*, about a young man designing fighter planes in the lead up to World War II.

The only drawback is that the sole extra feature is a bonus disc containing Miyazaki's warm, funny 90 minute-farewell press conference. With a £180 price tag, you have to ask yourself if you want the box, or if you'd rather buy the Blu-rays separately.

Jonathan Hatfull

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Belleville Rendez-Vous

A woman and her dog sets out with the aging Belleville triplets to find her grandson in this lovely French animation.



THE GREEN MILE: 15TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Lofty heights

Details 18 // 188 mins // 1999 // **Released** Out now **Director** Frank Darabont
Cast Tom Hanks, Michael Clarke Duncan, David Morse, Bonnie Hunt, Doug Hutchison
Distributor Warner Home Video



Frank Darabont needs to start directing films again – Stephen King adaptations if possible. His record on the big

screen (*The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Mist*, and the film we're reviewing here) speaks for itself – he's a safe pair of hands and so much more besides.

Nowhere is this capacity for consistency more evident than in *The Green Mile*, which takes subject matter that could have become ham-fisted or distasteful in the hands of less assured filmmakers and makes it palatable. At no point does it feel as long as its three hour-plus run time; not a sentence is wasted and not a shot unnecessary.

It helps that in addition to having an assured director, its lead is the ultimate safe-hands actor: Tom Hanks. As part of a group of everyday Joes used to sending off the worst that mankind has to offer, his reaction to experiencing something inexplicable is utterly believable, never once descending into the melodrama that it could have done.



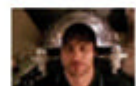
No *Green Mile* review can be complete without mentioning the extraordinary performance given by the late, great Michael Clarke Duncan as gentle giant John Coffey. The nature of his powers is never explained, but such is the depth of Duncan's portrayal that this doesn't matter; we are sold everything we need. It would be a disservice to just mention Hanks and Duncan though; other standout turns include Doug Hutchison as the sadistic Percy Wetmore, David Morse's good-cop prison guard Brutal and Sam Rockwell's psychopathic Wild Bill.

It doesn't quite hit the heights of *The Shawshank Redemption*, but then again not many do. The ending may strike some as slightly too clean-cut, but from another perspective it is rather fitting: the whole central conceit of the film is one of life going on and seeing light in the darkness, and the film's conclusion suitably reflects this.

Few films today interrogate the kind of themes that *The Green Mile* attempts, let alone do so with such grace. 15 years on, this remains a classic.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

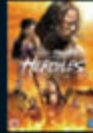


Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind
 Similarly life-affirming, albeit in a different way.

HERCULES

Rock of ages

Details 12 // 98 mins // 2014 // **Released** Out now **Director** Brett Ratner **Cast** Dwayne Johnson, Ian McShane, Rufus Sewell, John Hurt
Distributor Paramount Home Entertainment



Brett Ratner's good-humoured action romp has the distinction of being the better of 2014's two *Hercules* movies, and secures this not-massively lofty goal in large part due to the ludicrously strong supporting cast.

The big man himself is played by the ever-watchable Dwayne Johnson, who trades on his own myth as a mercenary, helped by his band of loyal warriors. He's recruited by Thracian king John Hurt and his growling henchman Peter Mullan to help liberate a city, but are things as clear-cut as they seem?

The battle scenes have a certain scope, but *Hercules* is at its most entertaining when it allows its cast to cut loose. *Hercules'* band is made up of scene-stealing Brits (Rufus Sewell, Ian McShane), Norwegian badasses (*Cold Prey's* Ingrid Bolsø



Berdal and *Headhunters'* Aksel Hennie) and Reece Ritchie's tale-spinner. Watching this lot scrap, bicker and wise-crack is more fun than any of the fairly routine plotting and decent set pieces, and it's the team dynamic that makes this more enjoyable than it should be.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★★

THE CONGRESS

Re-animated

Details 15 // 123 mins // 2014 // **Released** Out now **Director** Ari Folman
Cast Robin Wright, Harvey Keitel, Jon Hamm **Distributor** Studio Canal



Following on from the acclaimed *Waltz With Bashir*, director Ari Folman proves that he's not a one-trick pony with his adaptation of Stanislaw Lem's *The Futurological Congress*, delivering something that's equally visually unique, yet brilliantly intelligent to go with it – which is no mean feat by any means.

With *The Princess Bride* star Robin Wright (who turns in what is quite possibly a career-best performance) serving as a conduit, Folman delves into a world where actors have literally become a commodity, and ultimately fiction comes to represent an actual escape from reality as well as a metaphorical one. The world of *The Congress* is easy to get lost in for its inhabitants, and the same rings true with regards the viewing experience, proving to be just as immersive as Folman's first feature.

The abrupt transitions in narrative structure – bookended by jumps forward in time – are occasionally jarring, and in the worst instances off-putting, making it easy to get lost. Nevertheless, this is a film you'll want to be trapped in and revisit time and again.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★★



STANLEY KUBRICK: THE MASTERPIECE COLLECTION

Can't argue with that title

Details 18 // TBC mins // Various // **Released** Out now **Director** Stanley Kubrick
Cast Various **Distributor** Warner Bros



Few – if any – filmmakers have been as vitally important to the art form as

Stanley Kubrick. As Malcolm McDowell notes in one of this collection's many, many documentaries, he not only made a film in nearly every genre; he made the best films in those genres.

This box set spans his career from *Lolita* to *Eyes Wide Shut*, meaning that as with the previous Blu-ray release, there is no room for *Fear And Desire*, *Killer's Kiss*, *The Killing* and *Spartacus*. What is present are the films that we can confidently describe as being 100 per cent Kubrick, all of which are true masterpieces.

It's difficult to know what to say about *2001: A Space Odyssey*, *A*

Clockwork Orange or *The Shining* that hasn't been said before. The glacial beauty and willingness to explore the unknown that makes up *2001*, the ferocious wit and ever-more-relevant cultural commentary of *A Clockwork Orange*, and the sombre, unrelenting terror of *The Shining* remain undiminished, and each of these films offers up new joys upon rewatches.

So what's new? The extra features that were available on previous Kubrick box sets have been ported over (including the excellent documentaries *A Life In Pictures* and *O Lucky Malcolm!*). The new additions are a very handsome book containing sketches, on-set photos and script excerpts; two new-to-Blu-ray documentaries (*Stanley Kubrick In Focus* is a collection of famous talking heads discussing the brilliance of each

Sci-Fi Now
Must see now!



film, and there's another doc about *A Clockwork Orange*), and the star attraction: 90-minute documentary *Kubrick Remembered*.

The new doc is excellent, eschewing the traditional chronological career examination for a more personal collection of memories from his widow, his family, close collaborators and a few actors. There has clearly been an effort made here to reveal the man behind the legend, as the participants remember his warmth and sense of humour as well as his brilliance.

While the hefty price tag makes it hard to justify an upgrade from the previous Blu-ray collection, it is a lovely memorial, and this box set is a must if you're looking to swap out your DVDs for something sharper.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Alfred Hitchcock: The Masterpiece Collection
Hitchcock gets the same treatment. A must for a fan.

THE GUEST

Stranger danger

Details 15 // 100 mins // 2014 // **Released** 29 December
Director Adam Wingard **Cast** Dan Stevens, Sheila Kelley, Brendan Meyer, Maika Monroe, Ethan Embry **Distributor** Icon Entertainment



Directed and written by You're Next trope worshippers Adam Wingard and Simon Barrett, there's a

genuine love for the ex-rental VHS grab bag that they're drawing from – bits of *Halloween*, *The Hitcher*, *Rear Window* and *Shadow Of A Doubt*, and a splash of *The Hand That Rocks The Cradle*.

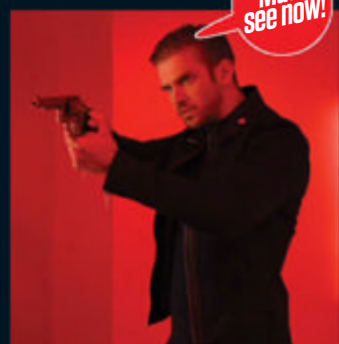
Yet, somehow it dances between genre like raindrops, positing a delicious psychological thriller/walk'n'stall horror/sci-fi action hybrid. If it had a style, it wouldn't be post-modern; it'd be 'reverential' – everything that appears in camera simply luxuriates.

It's helped by the presence of unlikely genre icon Dan Stevens (*Downton Abbey*'s cousin Matthew) as returning veteran David, who pitches up in sun-bleached New

Mexico on the eve of Halloween and inserts himself into the family life of a deceased comrade, pulling the door closed and turning the lock behind him.

It doesn't just aspire to be a cult classic; *The Guest* swaggers through your midnight movie marathon as if it already was one.

James Hoare
VERDICT ★★★★★



Sci-Fi Now
Must see now!

THE TOXIC AVENGER: PART II

Toxic schlock syndrome

Details 18 // 109 mins // 1989 // **Released** Out now **Directors** Lloyd Kaufman, Michael Herz **Cast** Ron Fazio, John Altamura, Phoebe Legere **Distributor** 88 Films



Recreating the uniquely demented magic of seeing 1984's *The Toxic Avenger* for the first time was

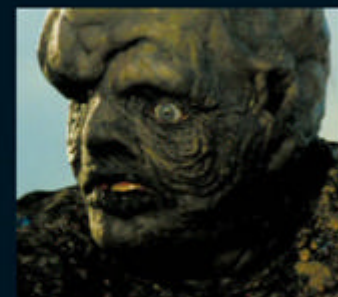
always going to be a tall order, but luckily Troma had other concerns – chief among them seemed to be using Toxie's mop to crowbar their way into the Japanese market.

The budget is over four times higher, but while much of it is spent on gross-out money shots (all now gloriously uncut), the rest is spent touring Tokyo locations and stereotypes with a frustrating lack of urgency and increasingly less charming sense of whimsy. The first film's subverted superhero story arc and revenge-of-the-nerds subtext has been replaced by a sort of scrolling beat 'em up series

of fights with increasingly daft bad guys.

It's not that there's too little plot – it's just when it's advanced by voiceovers it feels like nothing much is happening outside of set-piece splat-stick. Still, that very same colour palette is absolutely gleeful in HD.

James Hoare
VERDICT ★★★★★



GREMLINS: 30TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Gizmo the great

Details 15 // 102 mins // 1984 // **Released** Out now **Directors** Joe Dante
Cast Zach Galligan, Phoebe Cates, Hoyt Axton, Corey Feldman
Distributor Warner Home Video



The most formidable force in Joe Dante's on-screen scourge of small-town suburbia, 30 years on *Gremlins*

remains just as darkly amusing and wryly cutting, both as a satire on consumerism and as a straightforward comedy.

Indeed, such is its versatility that it functions just as well according to various other basic themes. Story of young love? Check. Rise of the underdog? Check. Creature feature? Also check. Mix in all the common Dante tropes (young protagonists, ultra-violence made family friendly, Corey Feldman), and you have the recipe for something truly memorable.



More than anything, the sign of greatness is timelessness. Steven Spielberg aside, arguably few filmmakers achieve this in their films as much as Dante, and nowhere is this more evident than in *Gremlins*.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★★

DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

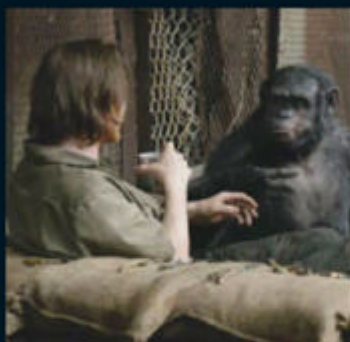
Hail Caesar

Details 12 // 130 mins // 2014 // **Released** Out now **Director** Matt Reeves
Cast Andy Serkis, Jason Clarke, Gary Oldman
Distributor 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



Those who found 2011 franchise re-igniter *Rise Of The Planet Of The Apes* to be just that bit too cumbersome will

find a lot to like in this sequel, which quickens the pace from the off and never slows down.



A lot of the credit for that has to go to Andy Serkis, Toby Kebbell, Judy Greer et al – not to mention the team behind the special effects – for just how excellently realised the apes are. In an age where CGI spectacles seemingly age overnight into shiny, glorified cartoons, the quality of the work here is such that we suspect this will age in a far more graceful manner.

If their human counterparts had been given a similar level of characterisation, then this could have been one of the greats. As it is, *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes* has to settle for merely being very good.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★★



THE HOBBIT: THE DESOLATION OF SMAUG EXTENDED EDITION

The long road to ruin

Details 15 // 186 mins // 2013 // **Released** Out now **Director** Peter Jackson
Cast Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen, Richard Armitage, Evangeline Lilly, Orlando Bloom
Distributor Warner Home Video



In the all-time list of movies that were already long enough as it is, it's fair to say that the *Hobbit* films rank pretty highly, what with

already stretching the small-to-medium-sized source material to near breaking point. It's a pleasant surprise then that the new elements are for the most part of decent quality, adding relevant information to existing scenes and even re-introducing some sub-plots that fell by the wayside in the editing bay.

For a start, there's a lot more of shape-changer Beorn (Mikael Persbrandt), which makes sense considering how jarringly brief his screen time was in the original cut. In turn, this gives rise to the resurrection of a whole different story strand featuring Thorin (Richard Armitage)'s absent father Thrain (Michael Mizrahi), who you may remember for going missing during the Battle at Moria in *An Unexpected Journey*. The best new additions, however, are a few additional scenes featuring Stephen Fry's odious Master, who gets some choice one-liners that we would have loved to have seen the first time around.

Some of the other new footage serve to highlight the series' flaws, however, like the inclusion of more Bombur (Stephen Hunter) capering and more terrible decisions from Thorin. Moreover, not enough of the characters are defined enough to render them engaging protagonists. While each and every member of the Fellowship in the *Lord Of The Rings* saga stood out, here it is less the case. Of the dwarves, only Thorin, Kili (Aidan Turner) and Balin (Ken Stott) get sufficient solo screen time in which to prove their worth.

It goes without saying that this is for über-fans only – those who thought the original cut was overlong may well find themselves rocking in a corner by the end. But this is aimed squarely at Tolkien and Peter Jackson aficionados, and it certainly finds its mark in this regard, representing a clear improvement on its forebear.

Steve Wright
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Willow
Ron Howard's underrated thriller doesn't get the credit or the respect it deserves.



Series Eight

DOCTOR WHO

Time to begin

Details 12 // 590 mins // // Out now **Creator** Steven Moffat
Cast Peter Capaldi, Jenna Coleman, Samuel Anderson **Distributor** 2entertain



With attack eyebrows that could apparently take off bottle caps, the new Doctor (Peter Capaldi) stormed onto our

screens in an extra-special long episode. It was a glimpse into how good the show could be if only the writers had as much time as the Doctor to play with. We get to sit around and sip tea with a spooked Clara (Jenna Coleman) and a confrontational Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh), and marvel at the new Time Lord's character arc.

The crime-fighting newlywed explains that youth is a way for him to be accepted, and the fact that he has tossed that out the TARDIS door means something. We just don't know what yet. She also berates his companion for being so stupid as to fall for the kid's entertainer act of Eleven, making us feel a little sheepish and sympathetic to this fragile incarnation.

Played by the magnificently accomplished Peter Capaldi, he is cantankerous and unpredictable. It's

golden when the whiplash one-liners remind us of Malcolm Tucker, but daft outings like 'Robot Of Sherwood' just grate. While the 2,100-year-old squabbles with the smarmy Robin Hood (Tom Riley), Clara gets her chance to shine. She's unshackled from the Impossible Girl arc and free to lead a double life, with adorable consequences. The introduction of squeeze Danny Pink (Samuel Anderson) provokes some interesting, if heavy-handed, soldier-bashing from the Doctor.

The usual Steven Moffat tropes are there in abundance: aliens that prevent basic impulses (this time breathing); predatory older women; visiting companions when they're children and the Minotaur-in-labyrinth motif, this time under the guise of a bank heist. There are also really lovely moments too, like the nods to old *Who* when Twelve quotes the very first episode, 'An Unearthly Child' ("Fear makes companions of us all"), and the sentimental surprise twist that saved the series finale. We won't salute Series Eight, but we'll give it a friendly nod.

Jodie Tyley
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Once Upon A Time
A whole host of characters you'll recognise beyond Robin Hood. Even Elsa and Anna from Frozen!



Season One

THE STRAIN

Stinger in the tale

Details 15 // 559 mins // // Out now **Creators** Guillermo del Toro, Chuck Hogan **Cast** Corey Stoll, David Bradley, Mia Maestro, Kevin Durand
Distributor 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment



It's fair to say that we had pretty high expectations for vampire show *The Strain*. Based on the trilogy of novels by Guillermo del Toro and Chuck Hogan, we were confident that a TV show would suit the books' episodic structure, especially given the fact that the pair was involved.

A plane arrives at JFK Airport with all its passengers dead. When CDC head Ephraim Goodweather (Corey Stoll) arrives to investigate, he finds that a few have survived, but they're released before he can figure out what happened. As Holocaust survivor Abraham Sertrakian (David Bradley) makes terrifying warnings, Eph soon realises that a terrifying infection has indeed arrived in New York.

Del Toro's presence is very much in evidence. His vampire mythology and biology is one of the show's strongest suits, as he creates a gruesome but utterly fascinating monster with an enormous stinger, reptile eyelids and tiny burrowing worms that carry the infection. Genre fans will also enjoy the

frequent doses of horror sequences that provide gory chills to great effect.

When it comes to the people, however, it is less consistent. The cast is strong, but the writing serves some better than others. Bradley balances Sertrakian's rage with a tragic humanity, while Kevin Durand steals scenes as vampire hunter Vasily Fet. The pair become the show's strongest characters as the series progresses, with their relationship recalling that of Hellboy and Dr Broom in del Toro's movies.

However, Eph's arrogance and short temper come across as simply irritating in a show where the bigger concerns are all too evident. Part of the problem is that the show's attempts to balance slow-build and pay-off don't work, leaving some characters with dull and inconsequential storylines that take time away from what we've come to see.

There's much to admire in *The Strain's* first season, and we're pleased that a second is confirmed. When it works, it's a rich, creative and gripping horror that draws on the best in vampire history while contributing something new. The writing and characterisation need work, but this is worth a bite.

Jonathan Hatfull
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Ultraviolet
A London copper joins a special branch tackling 'leeches' in this brilliant Nineties series.





The Complete Series

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

By your command

Details PG // 1,648 mins // 1978 // 24 November **Creator** Glen Larson
Cast Richard Hatch, Dirk Benedict, Lorne Greene, Laurette Sprang, Terry Carter, Anne Lockhart, Herb Jefferson Jr, Maren Jensen **Distributor** Universal Pictures UK



Sci-fi has a wonderful habit of gathering fans across generations: *Doctor Who*, *Star Trek* and *Star Wars* have been part of many childhoods.

The concept behind *Battlestar Galactica* (1978) is dark: the Twelve Colonies of Kobol are wiped out by a robotic race called the Cylons, save for the Galactica and a 'rag-tag fugitive fleet' of survivors.

Fleeing extermination and under the leadership of Admiral Adama (Lorne Greene), humanity heads into deep space in search of the fabled Thirteenth Colony that settled on Earth. The Cylons give chase, aided by traitorous Count Baltar (John Colicos), and beginning a 24-episode game of cat-and-mouse.

Re-watching the series in HD, its faults are as obvious as its reused effects footage, yet for all the scenery chewing and corny dialogue, it is fun to watch. The straight-laced Captain Apollo (Richard Hatch) and loveable scoundrel Starbuck (Dirk Benedict) make a great team as Galactica's flying aces, while the Cylons' eerie voices and pulsing red eyes remain menacing, if a tad dated – these were outfits built to be worn, not realised in CGI.

Opening episode 'Saga Of A Star World' is a three-part movie on a

grand scale. With concept art by Ralph McQuarrie and special effects by John Dykstra, the *Star Wars* connection is undeniable, but its buoyant optimism and kitsch makes it charming in its own right.

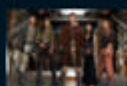
The most memorable stories are two-parters, the standouts being 'The Living Legend', guest starring Lloyd Bridges (*Airplane!*) as Admiral Cain, and 'War of the Gods' with Patrick Macnee (*The Avengers*). But these are top-loaded with action, only to lose steam in the second half, and the series hits a few other brick walls like 'The Lost Warrior', and woeful 'The Young Lords'.

Battlestar Galactica is high-concept, but hardly low-budget – its cost was the highest of its day, and you can see where the money went. The problem was that its ambition outstripped what TV was capable of achieving in 1978.

While it might be hard for anyone more familiar with Ronald D Moore's reimagined series to make the leap back, it is worth doing if only to see where those dark ideas came from.

Krystal Sim
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



Firefly
 Another cancelled show that became a cult classic, this sci-fi western is one of Joss Whedon's finest.



Season Seven

STAR TREK: THE NEXT GENERATION

Those were the voyages...

SCIFI NOW
 Must see now!

Details PG // 1,300 mins // 1993-94 // 15 December **Creator** Gene Roddenberry
Cast Patrick Stewart, Jonathan Frakes, Brent Spiner, Marina Sirtis, LeVar Burton, Michael Dorn, Gates McFadden, John de Lancie **Distributor** Paramount Home Entertainment



Star Trek: The Next Generation's final season has more ordinary episodes than outstanding ones. Yet, it's still a fitting final bow thanks to 'All Good Things...'. The series finale not only blends mystery and pathos into suspenseful drama, it also epitomises a special quality that the show brought to the franchise and to television in general. Echoing the series premiere, 'Encounter At Farpoint', the plot centres on another attempt by the alien Q to judge Homo sapiens for not living up to its potential. Picard's intelligence saves the day when he convinces Q that we can expand our horizons.

The notion that humanity can do better has been at *Star Trek's* core since *The Original Series*. It's central to the optimistic vision of an age when intellect and a desire to stand for something good are humanity's defining qualities. 'All Good Things...', however, exemplifies how *The Next Generation* promotes this ideal more

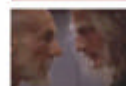
effectively than other series in the franchise because it's grounded in Picard's commitment to rationality over impulse.

No other show on television has so effectively espoused the message that we should reach beyond our differences for something greater. No wonder *The Next Generation* can feel outdated to viewers today, because drug dealers, gangsters and other losers are TV's icons. It also explains some of the derision for *Star Trek Into Darkness*, since the behaviour of several characters is the antithesis of progress.

Then again, *TNG* itself didn't always get it right. In contrast to the finale, the seventh season premiere, 'Descent Part II' is out of step with *Star Trek's* ethical foundations. The resolution involves Data dismantling his android sibling regardless of the rights he, himself, earned in Season Two. There are also mediocre scripts like 'Sub Rosa', 'Gambit' and 'Genesis' that could be in any sci-fi show. Ultimately, though, *TNG's* big goodbye makes up for this by bringing the series full circle and giving one last plug to the pursuit of discovery.

Michael Simpson
VERDICT ★★★★★

IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...



All Good Things...
 Not released in the UK, but worth it for the behind-the-scenes documentary and deleted scenes





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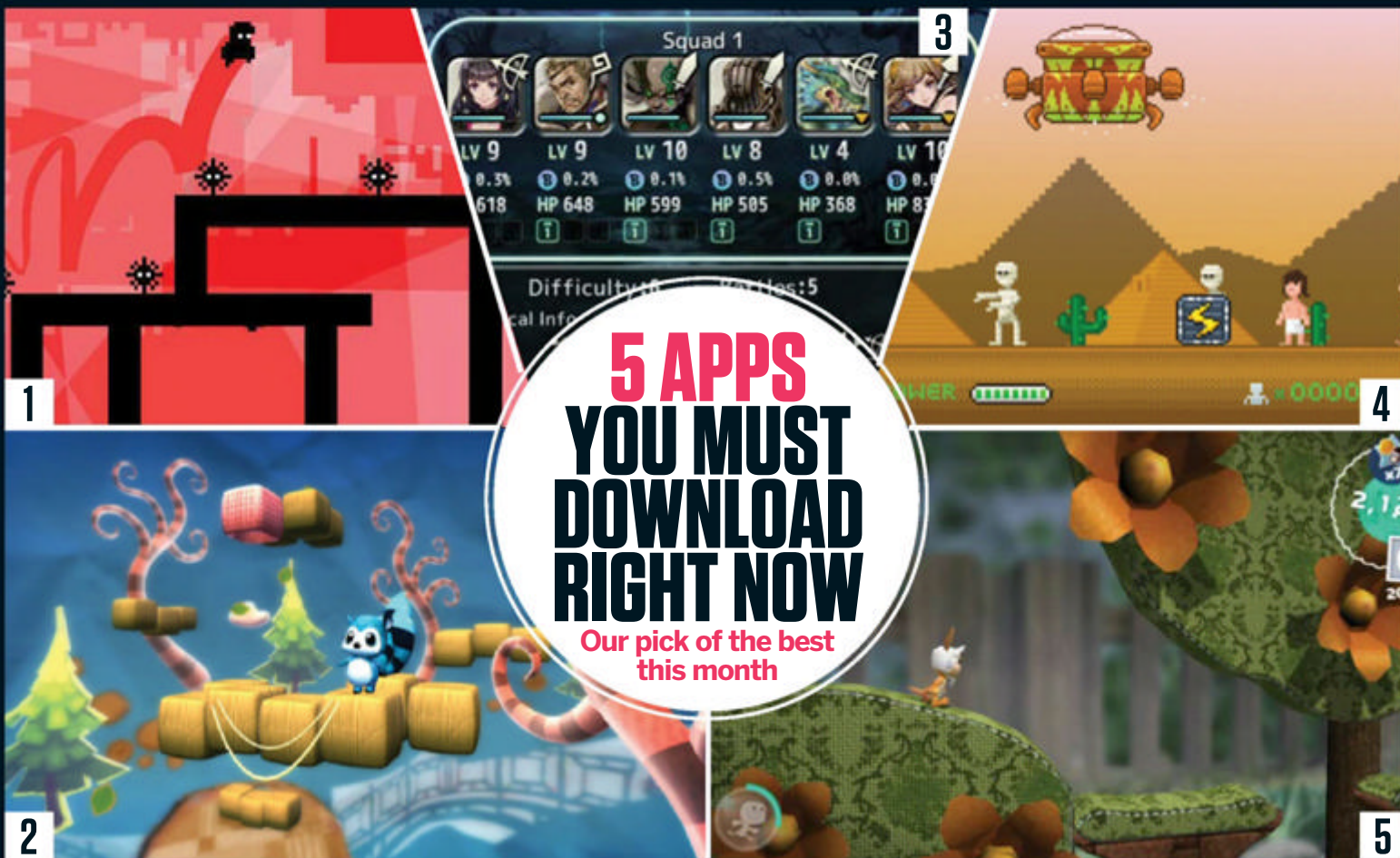
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5 APPS YOU MUST DOWNLOAD RIGHT NOW

Our pick of the best
this month

ELECTRONIC SUPER JOY: GROOVE CITY

PRICE: £2.99/\$4.99
FOR: IOS/ANDROID

Fans of platformer games will get a kick out of the *Electronic Super Joy* sequel *Groove City*. Your task is to help a robot named JoJo navigate the city, retrieve stolen items and defeat her enemy. *Groove City*'s vibrant graphics and action-packed gameplay are fun and engaging. It is quick and intense, while the punishing controls are complicated enough to send the difficulty levels through the roof.

BEST FOR: ROBOTEERS

MIIKA

PRICE: £1.49/\$1.99
FOR: IOS/ANDROID

If you like to challenge yourself then this fantastical puzzle game will get you thinking outside of the box before your morning latte. *Escher*-esque in style, the aim is to get Miika, a cute raccoon-like character, from A to B. To do this, you have to match up boxes to form bridges for Miika to cross. It sounds fairly simple, but there's a twist: this puzzle is all about optical illusions and perspective. It forces you to see things from not only a different angle, but a full 360 degrees.

BEST FOR: FRIENDS OF ROCKET

TERRA BATTLE

PRICE: FREE
FOR: IOS/ANDROID

This strategy RPG is a must-have app for all fans of *Final Fantasy* creator Hironobu Sakaguchi. You must work through a series of chapters, building up stamina and partaking in battles. You need to figure out how much damage to inflict in order to kill enemies, but you'd better hurry, because time is a factor in battle sequences. Old-school *Final Fantasy* creeps into the artwork, characters and even music of *Terra Battle*, but in a way that induces nostalgia.

BEST FOR: RPG FANS

HUMAN CRASHER

PRICE: £0.69/\$0.99
FOR: IOS

This action-packed arcade-style game is a fun and colourful homage to 16-bit alien games of the past. You play as an alien in a UFO and fly around abducting people, monkeys, pandas and more. You need to be wary of enemies and your fuel supply, but other than that it's mainly abductions. Presumably, master gamers could be playing into their golden years, or until their phones drain of power. *Human Crasher* brings hours of literally non-stop fun.

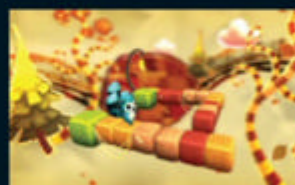
BEST FOR: ARCADE HOUNDS

RUN SACKBOY! RUN!

PRICE: FREE
FOR: IOS

Cute little Sackboy from *LittleBigPlanet* is back! He's just as cute, and running faster than ever. Fans of endless runner and platformer games will love this new game from PlayStation Mobile Inc. Your job is to help Sackboy navigate settings like The Gardens, The Canyons and Avalonia while collecting stickers, jumping traps and escaping the clutches of evil. It still retains everything that made *LittleBigPlanet* great.

BEST FOR: LITTLEBIG ADVENTURERS

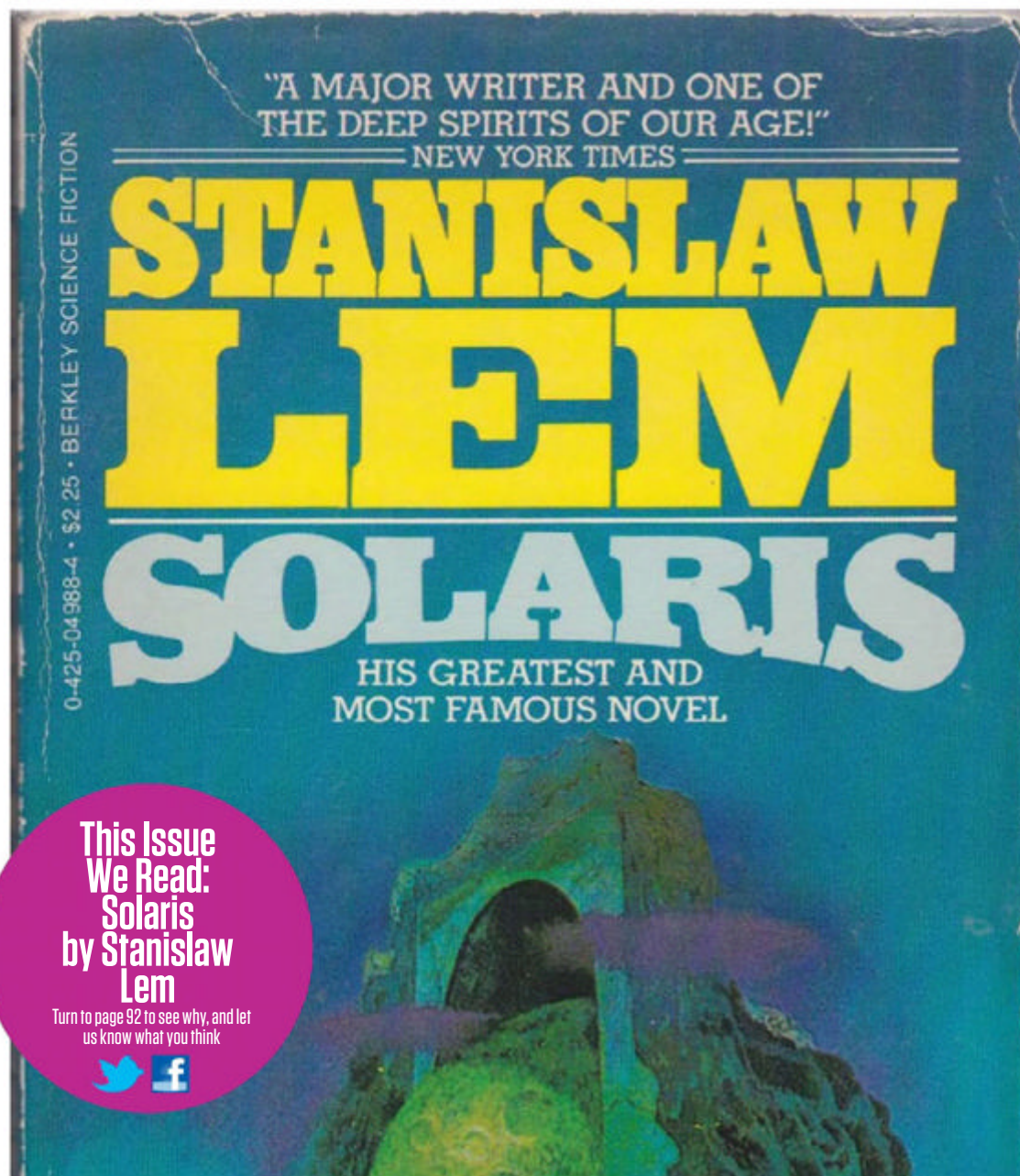


SciFiNow Book Club

Your community for reading and celebrating fantastic fiction



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This Issue
We Read:
Solaris
by Stanislaw
Lem

Turn to page 92 to see why, and let
us know what you think



**Next
We'll Be
Reading:**
The Prestige
by Christopher
Priest



1 Pick up *The Prestige* by Christopher Priest, the tale of two feuding magicians whose conflict takes them into some really dark territory.

2 Follow SciFiNow on Twitter. Read and share your thoughts with the hashtag #BookClub; they might make it into the magazine!

3 You can contribute to the Book Club discussions as much or as little as you like; the most important thing is that you have fun.

4 Pick up issue 103 of SciFiNow to check out what we thought and learn about the history of the book and its author with our Essential Read.

FEATURES

92 Essential Read: *Solaris*

How Stanislaw Lem's first-hand experience of mankind's flaws informed his greatest novel.

104 Roy Thomas

The former Marvel editor-in-chief on a lifetime shaping comics.

REVIEWS

96 Revival

97 Foxglove Summer

97 Golden Son

98 Descent

98 Symbiont

100 Inside HBO's *Game Of Thrones*

100 The World Of Ice & Fire

100 Prince Lestat

100 Star Wars: Tarkin

102 Original Sin

102 Sam Zabel And The Magic Pen

103 The Art Of The Simon And Kirby Studio

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Your Opinions

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Your Decision

Let us know what you want to see. This is your section, so tell us what you think

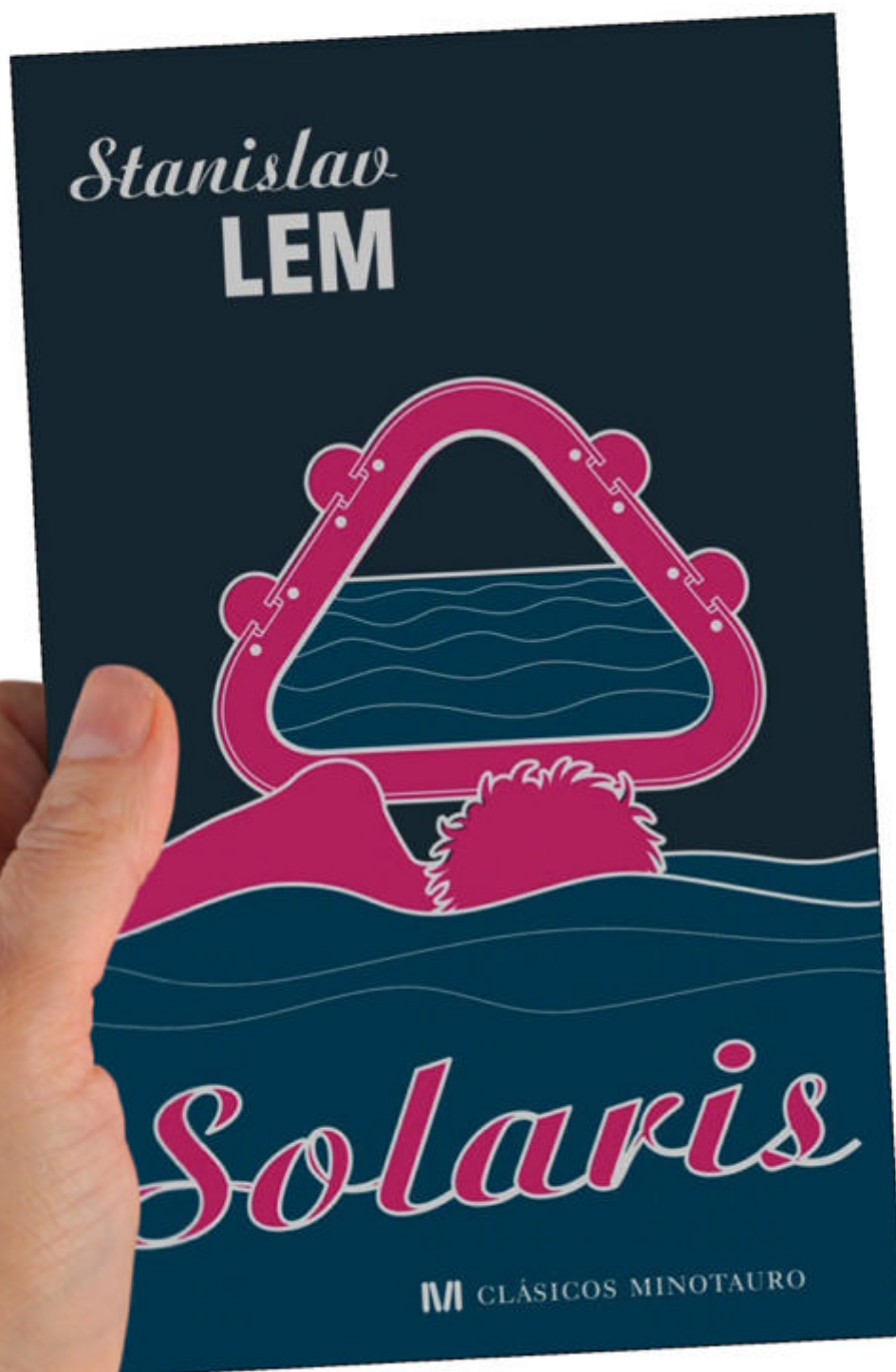
Your Reviews

Write a review of the last book you read, and it could appear on scifinow.co.uk. Submit your review as a 300-word text file to scifinow@imagine-publishing.co.uk

ESSENTIAL READ: SOLARIS

WORDS
MATTHEW
HANDRAHAN

AFTER HALF A LIFETIME ISOLATED FROM THE TRAPPINGS OF GENRE IN POLAND, AUTHOR STANISLAW LEM CREATED ONE OF THE TRULY VISIONARY WORKS OF SCIENCE FICTION...



When documenting the history of genre fiction, it doesn't take long to identify struggle as one of the defining

trends. For the most part, it has been the struggle for artistic acceptance in which so many of its practitioners engaged, and in which so few made any great progress. Granted, it can be argued that a seat at the top table of high culture is a dubious privilege at the best of times, but that won't have made the condescension any easier to bear. For almost the entirety of its recognised existence, a life writing sci-fi has been a life in the ghetto.

This is perhaps the most useful context in which to frame Stanislaw Lem's unpleasant snub at the hands of the Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America – or the 'SFWA', to put that tortuously long name out of its misery. Born in Lwow in Poland – now Lviv in the Ukraine – in 1921, Lem lacked the American-ness the SFWA demanded of its regular members, but the brilliance of his ideas and his stories couldn't be ignored.

It was 1973, and the SFWA had only awarded a single honorary membership before then: to an obscure English writer called JRR Tolkien. Lem, it decided, would be the recipient of the second.

What happened next remains the subject of debate – and probably an unresolvable one, given that all of the major players are dead – but it seems clear that a group

SYNOPSIS



When Kris Kelvin arrives aboard the Solaris space station, its crew have been engaged with studying the planet from which it takes its name for several decades. To

the layperson, the planet Solaris would appear to be a single body of water, a vast ocean unbroken by even the tiniest fragment of land. But the scientists engaged in the nascent field of Solaristics have a deeper understanding – or they think they do.

They have closely monitored the ocean, describing its every movement and behaviour with a dense network of invented names and descriptors. But it is only when they take the more drastic step of bombarding its surface with high-energy X-rays that the most remarkable phenomena start to appear – and it is only then that the limitations of their understanding are brutally and disturbingly exposed, with the vast gulf between their own consciousness and that of Solaris laid bare.

of writers raised objections to Lem's status as an honorary member. Due to a combination of language and politics, the Polish author had only started to receive his due in the US in the dying days of the Sixties, and he had been publicly critical of the quality and ambition of American science fiction from the outset. Yet, more than five years later his reputation was challenged by no less a figure than Philip K Dick, one of the few American writers for whom Lem had genuine admiration.

"The honorary voting of Stanislaw Lem to membership is the sheep voting the wolf a place at the communal hearth," Dick told SFWA members in 1975 in just one of several politically charged statements about Lem, including a letter to the FBI the prior year. "They certainly must be licking their chops back in Krakow right now."

With the pot stirred, the accusations started to fly: Lem was a propagandist for communism; he was involved in illegally copying American books for publication on the far side of the Iron Curtain; and he couldn't even read English. Ultimately, Lem's membership was revoked in 1976, a move that SFWA president Jerry Pournelle claimed was due to a technicality in the rules of the organisation. Let's just say there's ample reason to doubt that and move right along.

However, while it may be true that Lem was treated unfairly by a vocal minority of his American peers, it is at least possible to see the root of that animosity. As far as they were concerned, Lem was one of them,

and one of the very best. His occasionally withering assessments of the genre were an attack from within its ranks, and as well as being rare, they tend to sting far more than anything meted out by the literary elite. There was just one fatal problem with that point-of-view: Lem had no idea he was a science fiction writer.

To clarify that statement, it's necessary to return to Lem's upbringing in Poland. The son of a physician, he was raised with a deep respect for science, and would spend his days sharing in his father's interest in geophysics, anatomy and astronomy. "There was a lot of talk about the planets, whose names I was able to recite before I started school," he said in a biography. "My father did not criticise my suggestion that the rings of Saturn are turning more and more slowly, although keeping silent in response to a view that so blasphemously violated the fundamental laws of mechanics must have cost him a lot."

That last comment is indicative of an attitude that Lem would inherit from his father and carry with him throughout his life. Time and again, there are examples of him refusing to back down from what he saw as the truth, and by the time the German army rolled into Lvov in 1941 the opportunities to do so were in plentiful supply. Lem was almost 20 years old, and already studying medicine at university with an ambition to follow his father's example. World War II put a stop to that, not least because his family's Jewish heritage made every day a possible threat



George Clooney as Chris Kelvin in the 2002 film version of *Solaris*.

to their continued survival. He worked as a mechanic and a welder for a German-owned company, did what he could to help the Polish resistance movement, and closed out the war in hiding, waiting for the Soviet army to arrive and liberate the city.

As the war ground to a halt, Lem wanted nothing more than to finish his degree, but he encountered a new and unexpected form of ignorance. Josef Stalin's regime had a habit of warping and twisting the facts to suit its needs, and Lem soon learned that the sciences were not exempt from perversion.

"When... the attacks on orthodox

Donatas Banionis as Kris Kelvin in the 1972 adaptation by Andrei Tarkovsky.



5 Reasons to read... *Solaris*

1 It's better than the Steven Soderbergh film for a start. Even if you do read science fiction regularly, there's an excellent chance that when you think of *Solaris*, you think of George Clooney.

2 To right old wrongs. Lem's career suffered a great many setbacks, both within Russian and eastern Europe, and once his books were finally published elsewhere in the world. Only now is he held in the correct level of esteem.

3 To see a different way of looking at science fiction. Lem's environment was so different to that in which authors like Robert Heinlein worked that he barely recognised their work as the same genre.

4 To see if Lem's work is science fiction or not. While he has long been considered one of the genre's leading voices, he developed his talent without access to the huge volume of work produced elsewhere in the world.

5 You can finally read it as the author intended. For decades, the only English-language version of *Solaris* available was a poor translation of a French edition. A new Polish-to-English version was finally published in 2011.

Issue 103's
Essential Read:
The Prestige
by Christopher Priest

Join in and share your thoughts on
Twitter or Facebook





Your Take On The Classic

WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



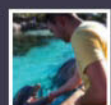
"Utterly beautiful and proper, intelligent SF. One of those books that I would love to read again for the first time #BookClub"
@Brummie_Jen



"Wonderful book #Book Club"
@meowy24



"I thought I would love it, but it didn't resonate with me #BookClub"
@DavidCogeshall



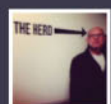
"Haven't read the book, but the George Clooney film adap was great, want to read it! #BookClub"
@ConroyCraig



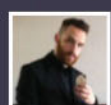
"To me it's essential, a signpost work. It's unlike any other novel I know, though it riffs on themes Philip K. Dick became famous for: 'Am I real & how would I know?' #BookClub"
@TMA7



"Lem wasn't concerned so much with eroticism as either *Solaris* movie adaptation was but the emotions felt through human connection #BookClub"
@MitchellCorner



"Excellent film. Very 70s - short hand for long #BookClub"
@DaveNeal33



"I tried but it read like a bad translation job. Unfortunately it's the only English translation there is apart from e-book #BookClub"
@neil_bomb

What do you think? Let us know on Twitter or Facebook

"MY REACTION TO SCIENCE FICTION IS THAT OF MY BODY TO POLLEN"

STANISLAW LEM

➤ genetics started, I didn't like that at all," he said in an interview with the *Missouri Review*. "I had wanted to continue studying theoretical biology, but now I didn't want to anymore – and, in fact, I couldn't. As was usual at that time in Poland, all my colleagues first had to enlist in the army, and they became lifelong army surgeons. Since I wasn't on too good a footing with the military, I didn't pass my last examination. Nobody could force me to give them the answers they wanted."

Instead, Lem moved to Krakow, where he divided his time between writing papers for a scientific publishing house and stories and poems for magazines and newspapers – all with the fixed goal of earning enough money to both support himself and provide some financial aid to his father, who was still working at the age of 73. "That was the beginning," Lem recalled. "It had nothing at all to do with science fiction."

Indeed, the very term 'science fiction' was unfamiliar to Lem in his formative years as a writer. He had read – and adored – HG Wells and Olaf Stapledon as a young boy, but the war and the long-standing political tumult that framed it had stemmed the flow of culture from elsewhere in the world. Lem's voice evolved in a bubble, so to speak, where the works of Heinlein and Isaac Asimov weren't a part of the cultural fabric. A far more influential factor was the constant presence of state control, with virtually all of Lem's early stories and novels subject to some kind censorship – from the inclusion of pro-communist sentiment to the suppression of entire books. His second novel, *The Magellan Nebula*, for example, was delayed by four years over its use of the "false capitalist science" of cybernetics.

"When I began writing, I didn't think of myself as a science fiction writer. I did not define my writing at all," Lem said in a 1981 interview with Raymond Federman. "I wasn't even certain as to what type of writing I was doing. At that time, science fiction, as it was being written in the US, was practically unknown in Poland."

But when Lem's work began to appear in the Soviet Union in the early Fifties, it quickly gained a large following. By the middle of the decade, his reputation afforded him creative freedoms that few were allowed. His stories were published

in East Germany, the Soviet Union – pretty much everywhere in socialist Europe. It was at this point in his career that Lem had his first encounter with what American science fiction had become. As we established at the very start of this article, he wasn't always kind about what he found.

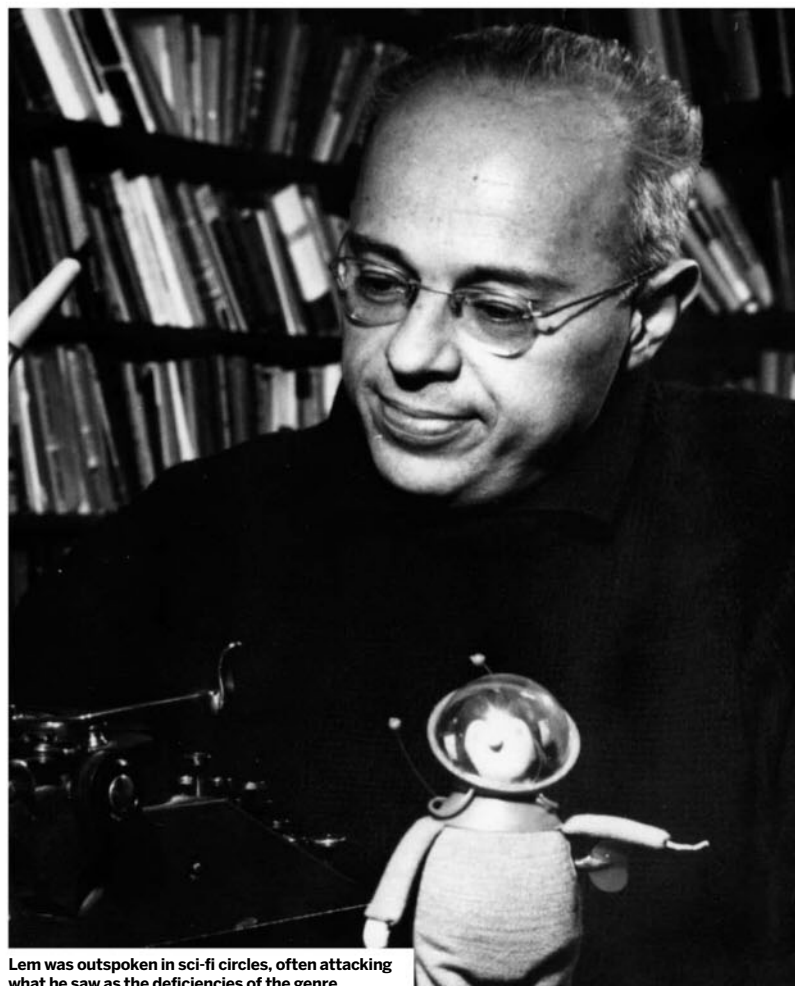
"I wrote a few poor science fiction novels in my youth," he said in an interview with the reformist Iranian newspaper, *Shargh*. "All critics push me back into that 'SF pit.' My reaction to science fiction resembles that of my body with respect to pollen, [and] I suffer from hayfever. Why do people read science fiction? If all an author has

to offer is a 'fantastic story,' I am able to come up with a dozen of my own. I never read to kill time. Killing time is like killing someone's wife or a child. There is nothing more precious for me than time."

However you describe his stories, *Solaris* is illustrative of the gulf between his vision and that of his contemporaries in the US. One of Lem's principal grievances with most work classified as science fiction was the disregard for actual science. It grated on his patience just as he imagined his own immature musings about planetary motion had rankled his father. To Lem, all but a few writers working in the genre



Of the films, Tarkovsky's version comes the closest to realising Lem's vision – although he liked neither of them.



Lem was outspoken in sci-fi circles, often attacking what he saw as the deficiencies of the genre.



were effectively peddling romances and adventures dressed up in spaceships and alien races.

Published in 1961, around five years after Lem was exposed to American science fiction, *Solaris* was different – very different, in fact, though it's doubtful that he intended it to be any kind of a rebuke. Lem's fiction had been heading in its own direction for quite some time. The utopian undertones of his earlier novels were gone, replaced by a more pessimistic view of both science and humanity's ability to use it as a tool to better understand reality and the universe. Where so many other novels presented alien life as an anthropomorphised fantasy to be fought, romanced and generally understood, Lem took the notion that human beings would be incapable of even recognising such an advanced form of intelligence as his first principle. They make observations and apply complicated labels, but they are merely applying human inventions to something that exists in an entirely separate way, governed by its own logic.

"The scientist's mathematical apparatus is like a cane in the hand of a blind man," Lem told the *Missouri Review*. "He doesn't see the world directly, but by hitting the ground with his cane he can hear the echo and can recognise whether he is coming close to an obstacle. But you cannot really say that the blind man is thus able to see a wall. By this circuitous route we continue to manipulate things. In other words, all knowledge is subjective. There's a horizon of human perception, and beyond this the fruit of observation will be gleaned from other beings."

Above all, then, *Solaris* is about communication – a theme that Lem encountered throughout his life; be it in his refusal to give false information in his university exams to appease the government, that tenacious need to explain his disappointment at what science fiction had become, or the rumours and outright lies that started spreading when his American peers sought to strip him of what should have been an honour. Honest and effective communication was fraught with barriers and obstacles, even with those separated by a single sub-culture or just a few thousand miles. What hope did we have of making contact with life that evolved tens of millions of light years away?

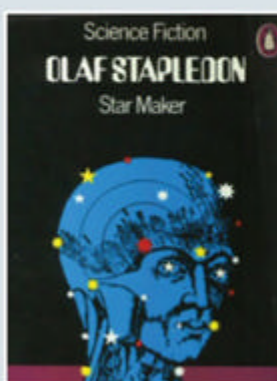
By the end of his life, Lem had found perhaps the only possible answer. As Lem stated in the essay collection, *The Chain Of Chance*: "Who shall separate the nonsense from what is valuable? Who shall put it all together in a right perspective? I am no longer capable of doing it. I no longer believe that, even if I tried to scream at the top of my voice, I might change anything."

Where Have I Seen This Before?

GOING ONE STEP BEYOND

STAR MAKER ▶

One of Lem's chief irritations with most science fiction writers was their tendency to focus on the whims and desires of individual characters, losing sight of the larger ideas. Lem's work can rarely be accused of doing this, and Olaf Stapledon's epic *Star Maker* was a major influence in developing that tendency. "A true eye-opener," Lem said of Stapledon.



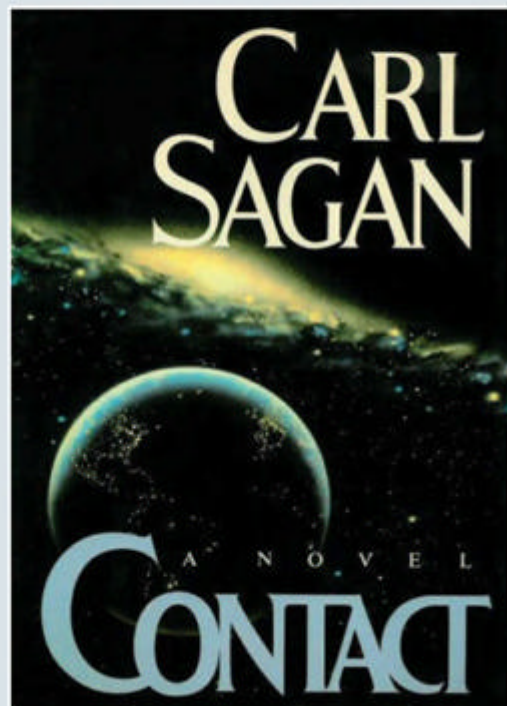
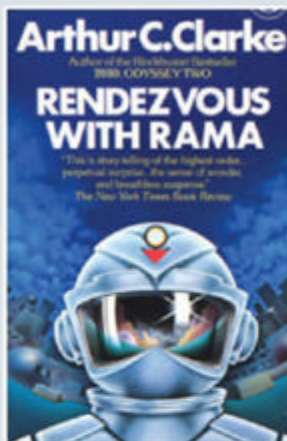
◀ HIS MASTER'S VOICE

This is arguably Lem's second best-known work of fiction after *Solaris*, and it also deals with humanity's inept attempts to make contact with an extraterrestrial intelligence. By this time, Lem had lost interest in far-flung planets, choosing to set *His Master's Voice* in the real world – a neutrino signal received by a telescope array in the Nevada desert.



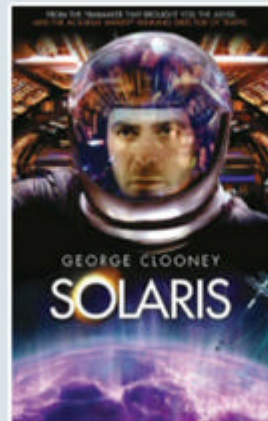
RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA ▶

Arthur C Clarke was one of the few science fiction authors to receive any compliments from Lem, and always for his scientific understanding rather than his skill as an author of prose. Clarke wrote several classic first-contact novels, but *Rendezvous With Rama* has the most in common with *Solaris*, preserving the mystery of its enigmatic alien visitors.



CONTACT ▲

Carl Sagan's 1985 novel deserves to be read in its own right, and while it's hard to be sure just how much of a debt it owes to Lem's work, it's impossible to miss the similarities in its premise. The setting certainly evokes *His Master's Voice*, while the means of communication between the aliens and the protagonist are redolent of *Solaris*.



◀ SOLARIS

Any cineaste will tell you that if you're looking for the best adaptation of *Solaris*, the first port of call should be Andrei Tarkovsky's 1972 version. But you probably encountered Steven Soderbergh's snappier, glossier 2002 film first, and in truth it makes little difference. Lem publicly dismissed both films, though he was crueler about the Soderbergh version.

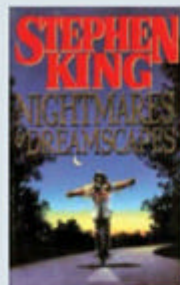
SUNSHINE ▶

For many, Danny Boyle's 2007 film was a wasted opportunity, a cruel example of the real ambition succumbing to the nitwit demands of the movie-going public. Nevertheless, it's head and shoulders above most cinematic science fiction, and for two acts it's about as close to Lem's heady brew as a film has come since Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey.



Your Five King novels

CHOOSE YOUR TOP FIVE
@SCIFINOW ON TWITTER



1. Nightmares & Dreamscapes

"Nightmares & Dreamscapes. A collection of fantastic short stories which just go unnoticed... #BookClub" @kerpow42



2. Lisey's Story

"Toss up between Duma Key and Lisey's Story. Both have characters and plots much more engrossing than their blurbs suggest. #BookClub" @crazyjane13



3. The Talisman

"The Talisman. Maybe expectations were too high and people were surprised by the strong fantasy aspect. I love it. #BookClub" @bookiesnacks



4. Cujo

"Cujo. Often dismissed as something farted out while he was in his drink/drug phase, it's a tight, entertaining read. #BookClub" @HannahChapter1



5. The Eyes of the Dragon

"The Eyes of the Dragon. Nobody ever talks about it. #BookClub" @TSquadBrave

Details Author: Stephen King Publisher: Hodder Price: £20 Released: Out now

REVIVAL

Are fiends electric?

SciFiNow
Must read now!

It's fair to say that there are few authors as capable of conjuring a creeping sense of dread as Stephen King; he's the master. *Revival* reminds us of how skilful he can be.

Our narrator is Jamie Morton, who tells the story of how his life was forever changed by the arrival of the man he refers to as his "fifth business," preacher Charles Jacobs. This friendly family man is a hit with the whole town, but when tragedy strikes, Jacobs takes it badly.

Later in life, Jamie comes across Jacobs again, and discovers that the former padre's interest in electricity has become his career and an all-consuming passion. Jacobs can harness this incredible power to do amazing things, even curing the sick. So why does he make Jamie so anxious: what secret is he hiding?

Revival begins in classic King territory. A child is confronted by the harsh realities of the world, as narrated by the wry adult whose

nostalgia is tinged with pain. First kisses and childhood victories are more mournful than rose-tinted. It's that nostalgia that plays a big part of *Revival's* deceptively leisurely tone. Charlie certainly has a rough time of it. He suffers his share of loss, and his addiction is what leads him as an adult musician to accept the offer of help from Jacobs when he finds him at a small-town carnival.

As the novel hits its halfway point, it seems to settle into a groove that's a little bit too comfortable. King's love of music is given a lot of room, and the author clearly enjoys writing a character who knows his stuff, content in the knowledge that his talent allows him to be a part of the scene, if not on stage.

However, the creeping sense of dread that we were talking about is never too far away. While some of the passages read as a little hackneyed, King slowly teases out the details of what Jacobs has been up to. Charlie finds himself drawn back into the life of his old pastor, and realises that the truth goes beyond what he could have imagined. It's difficult to talk too much about the book's influences without spoilers, but the final third sees him draw on some classic authors to strong effect.

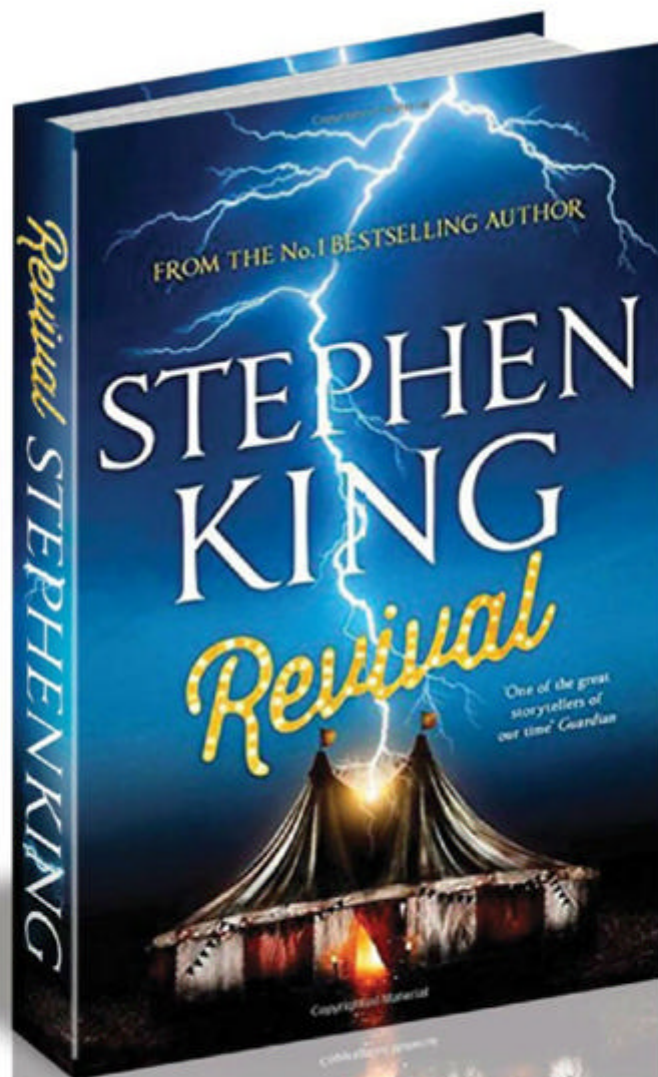
There are some drawbacks, however. The drifting focus and leisurely pace are occasionally an issue, even given the book's modest 372-page count. Considering his long absences, the transformation that Charlie undergoes is a little extreme, although King handles the events that drive him from God superbly. Indeed, although *Revival* does occasionally rely on some staples, King is such a gifted writer that he manages to make them arresting despite their familiarity (a horrifying dream sequence is probably the best example of this).

While *Revival* doesn't stand with King's best work, it's a well-crafted and unsettling tale that shows that the author is more than capable of getting under your skin and it builds to a finale that will stay with you after you turn out the light.

Jonathan Hatfull

VERDICT ★★★★★

"IT'S THAT NOSTALGIA THAT PLAYS A BIG PART OF REVIVAL'S DECEPTIVELY LEISURELY TONE"



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...
Hearts In Atlantis
Stephen King
A young boy meets an old man with strange powers in King's novella collection



Details Author: Ben Aaronovitch Publisher: Gollancz Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

FOXGLOVE SUMMER

Hot stuff

If you've not yet encountered the wonderful world of apprentice wizard and police constable Peter Grant, you would do well to consider getting acquainted. *Foxglove Summer* is the fifth in the *Rivers Of London* series, yet ironically takes place in the delightfully quaint village of Rushpool in Herefordshire. There is more than a hint of *Hot Fuzz* about

this London-loving cop, attempting to inconspicuously mix with the local yokels while hoping to help solve the mysterious disappearance of two young girls.

With very little to go on other than the discovery of two abandoned mobile phones, faerie foul play is considered, and Peter is granted permission to conduct a "falcon" investigation, or as he likes

neatly tying up loose ends and satisfying the reader, *Foxglove Summer* may be considered a little annoying for those who don't want a London breather. Yet this little country retreat offers much in the way of a fresh, singular plot to devour with some real police action and adventure. The fairy action is a little disappointing in length, though what little there is manages

"THIS LITTLE COUNTRY RETREAT OFFERS A FRESH, SINGULAR PLOT TO DEVOUR"

to describe it, "weird shit". Ably assisted by the newly introduced and broad-minded DC Dominic Croft, Peter unearths scandal, stoners, an amorous river goddess and some very naughty unicorns.

Fans of the previous four books may lament the lack of London-based characters, as well as author Ben Aaronovitch's decision to avoid addressing the events of *Broken Homes*. Toying with the conventional routine of continuity,

to evoke a spooky sense of unease and promise of things to come.

All in all, it's a witty instalment with possibly the longest chapters seen in a book this year.

Claire Nicholls

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Wine Of Angels
Phil Rickman
It's tough being a female vicar, and even tougher when paranormal activity needs a woman's touch.



Details Author: Pierce Brown Publisher: Hodder & Stoughton Price: £16.99 Released: 1 January 2015

GOLDEN SON

Ender's Game of Thrones

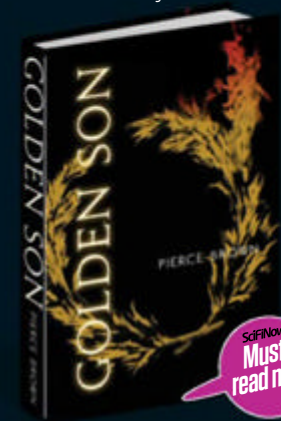
Golden Son continues the story of interstellar revolution stoked in last year's surprise hit, *Red Rising*. In a future where humanity has expanded, but is ruled by a brutal elite, our hero is Darrow, a Martian Spartacus plotting to overthrow it.

After discovering that his people don't toil in mines to terraform Mars as pioneers, but to fuel an empire as slaves, Darrow joined the Brothers of Ares, a liberation front waging war on the master race, the Golds. Disguised as a Gold and having proven himself in the bloody battle royal of the Gold training school in book one, *Golden Son* immerses Darrow among the ruling class. But all of his military training has not prepared him for the political scheming that is the norm

amongst the elite. As the Gold's in-fighting gives way to civil war between planets, the story returns to familiar territory, moving from one action set piece to the next, with Darrow leading armies into battle while always exploiting the situation for the revolution.

Pierce Brown proves that his vivid writing style can just as easily conjure an enthralling space opera as he could the close-quarters killing of *Red Rising*. But as the saga has expanded, there's a danger the central character has been lost.

Darrow pays lip service to the horrors of committing so many to die, though is never called on it. Equally, his soapy romance with Gold love interest Mustang tos-and-fros, ultimately remaining unresolved. Hopefully



this is only symptomatic of it being the in-between book in a series, and we'll see more character development in the final instalment.

Jack Parsons

VERDICT ★★★★★



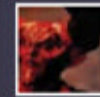
Unwrapped Sky
Rjurik Davidson
Like political sci-fi and fantasy? *Unwrapped Sky* reads like *Les Misérables* with minotaurs.

YOUR READS

What you lot have been reading this month



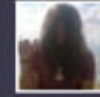
"*The Twelfth Planet* by Zecharia Sitchin. It's "Chariots of the Gods" stuff really. Fun though. #BookClub" @TheCrowLady



"Re-reading *Skeleton Crew*. Purists might prefer *Night Shift*, but this is my favourite Stephen King story collection #BookClub" @HannahChapter1



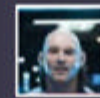
"*Time Riders: The Infinity Cage* by @AlexScarrow it is awesome! #BookClub" @quidditysea



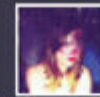
"*The City* by Stella Gemmell... Liking it a lot! #BookClub" @BhbMark



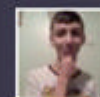
"*The Metal Men Archives, Vol. 1*, those '60s comics are awesome sauce :D #BookClub" @IsaacCardenas



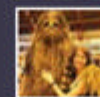
"*The Stars My Destination*. Mind blowing it came out in '54. #BookClub" @BlabbedboutMars



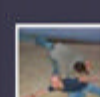
"Almost finished *The Handmaid's Tale* @MargaretAtwood it is so well written, but also one of the most traumatic books I have read. #BookClub" @Cascararogue



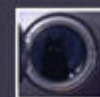
"I read a bit of *The Colour of Magic* and I think it's okay so far. #BookClub" @Jbarnes532



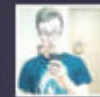
"I started gorging myself on *The Ocean At The End Of The Lane* by @neilh himself last night. Brilliant book. #BookClub" @Abby_Chandler



"James Herbert's *The Dark*... Lot of build up, lots. Slightly underwhelmed. #BookClub" @sdriver75



"Currently reading *Dead Man's Hand* - brilliant Weird West anthology compiled and edited by @JohnJosephAdams #BookClub" @mangozoid



"The new Stephen King book, *Revival*! It's fantastic. #BookClub" @djangoxfett

Tell us what you're reading on Twitter or Facebook



60 SECONDS WITH

Christopher James Hart

How would you pitch *Aucella* and the *Altered Stone* series?

If a city had the ability to fold in on itself and crush you at any given moment, would you enter it for any reason? For riches? For science? For fame? These ancient cities were built to flee and hide for a reason. Their transmutations now lay broken, uncontrollable and unpredictable, but their secrets and artefacts still lay open for the taking. In the city of Aucella, something dark and sinister lies waiting; something that the ancient civilisations feared, which now returns to the world.

What are the challenges of creating your own setting for a story?

The main challenge I faced was a temporal one; the fourth story in the series is likely set to be a flashback, meaning I have had to carefully juggle my timeline in relation to when and how certain characters cross paths and certain mysteries are revealed. I would definitely deem the ability to create my own geography exciting, especially when it comes to the layout of transforming cities. When it comes to building a world I would recommend crafting it one small step at a time, rather than all at once.

"THE FOURTH STORY IN THE SERIES IS LIKELY SET TO BE A FLASHBACK"

Have you always been drawn to genre?

Definitely. I would say that Tolkien and Douglas Adams were my starting points, both of which I read at age 14. At University I undertook a few modules in the literature and film of Science Fiction. It was within those modules that my knowledge of Science Fiction truly flourished, leading me to write a dissertation which compared Philip K Dick and Stanislaw Lem, as well as a Masters dissertation which analysed the genre image of Science Fiction and Fantasy.

Which authors inspired you?

Aucella was heavily inspired by Robert W Chambers' *The King In Yellow*. For the series as a whole, Joe Abercrombie was very influential, helping me to find blunt honesty in my characters. China Miéville's *The Scar* was also an influence from a sea-faring perspective and Frederik Pohl's *Gateway* from a risk-taking perspective.



Aucella, the sequel and third instalment in the *Altered Stone* series, are available now from Amazon.

Details Author: Ken MacLeod Publisher: Orbit Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

DESCENT

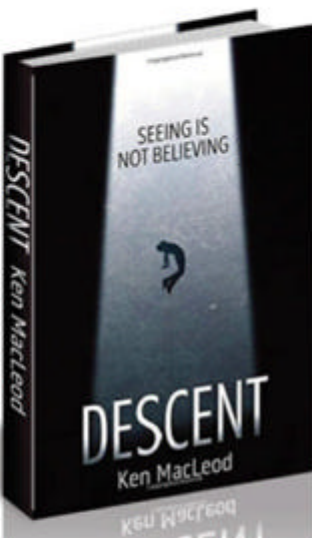
UFO conspiracy meets political thriller

In the near future, where the population of an independent Scotland is under Big Brother-levels of surveillance, how does a crashing UFO go unnoticed?

16-year-old Ryan Sinclair is knocked unconscious by a strange object falling from the sky. His initial, rational justifications of the event – ball lightning, secret aircraft tests, weather balloons,

hallucinations – don't quite explain what happened. *Descent* follows Ryan as his determination to uncover the truth becomes an obsession that shapes the rest of his life. After the first few chapters, however, the science-fiction aspect takes a back seat. *Descent* essentially becomes a coming of age story in the midst of government cover-ups, political upheaval and

throwaway references alluding to what has happened in the meantime, such as a fallout count in the weather forecast implying that a serious war took place. Other aspects of the prose are less successful, particularly the dialogue of Ryan's best friend Calum, which is phonetically written in a thick Scottish brogue that is unnecessarily obtuse in places.



"DESCENT ESSENTIALLY BECOMES A COMING OF AGE STORY"

revolutionary spies. With a human speciation conspiracy thrown into the mix – an idea that could arguably drive a novel of its own – the sheer number of layers to the plot make it difficult to weave into one cohesive thread.

MacLeod paints a credible future, involving surveillance drones that fill the skies, clothes made from supermaterials and augmented reality via smart glasses. There are simple yet effective

Descent may struggle to find an identity as it shifts between genres, but it introduces plenty of clever concepts that linger in the mind after finishing the novel.

Jackie Snowden

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

The Happier Dead
Ivo Stourton
A political thriller in which medical treatments give the rich immortality, but the poor pay the price.

Details Author: Mira Grant Publisher: Orbit Price: £8.99 Released: Out now

SYMBIONT

World War Worms

Jumping straight in where *Parasite* left off, Mira Grant's *Symbiote* is an alternative take on the world's end. Due to the narrative's fast-paced nature, however, it's almost essential readers start with book one.

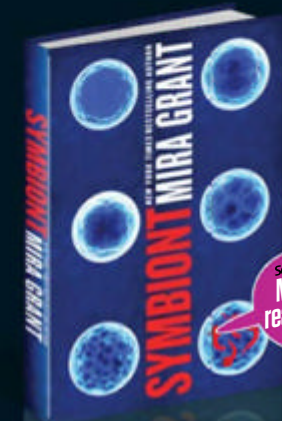
Part two continues to explore the destruction the Intestinal Bodyguard – a parasite living within humans to boost the immune system – is causing throughout the United States. Where *Parasite* was focused on cause, *Symbiote* is about effect, with the hurdle of survival continually at the forefront as the US is overrun with famished 'sleepwalkers'.

Sal remains a likeable lead; admittedly dependent, but surprisingly strong when the occasion calls. Her reliance on boyfriend Nathan adds

romance and means her moments of independence resonate well with readers, allowing you to route for her with ease. In contrast, antagonists aren't afraid to cut open leads in the name of science, making it easy to dislike them.

Prose is extremely well written so you can devour the book quickly. As with *Parasite*, the premise is believable due to its science-driven nature.

Grant has succeeded when it comes to creating a petrifying apocalypse – car and ferry escapes adding an excellent amount of suspense. The inclusion of gore is impeccably timed; the level of blood and guts enough to induce panic, whilst avoiding being so OTT it becomes less about characters



SciFiNow
Must read now!

and more about lifeless and, at times, limbless beings.

The cliffhanger conclusion means you'll undoubtedly be excited for the finale.

Rowena Heal

VERDICT ★★★★★

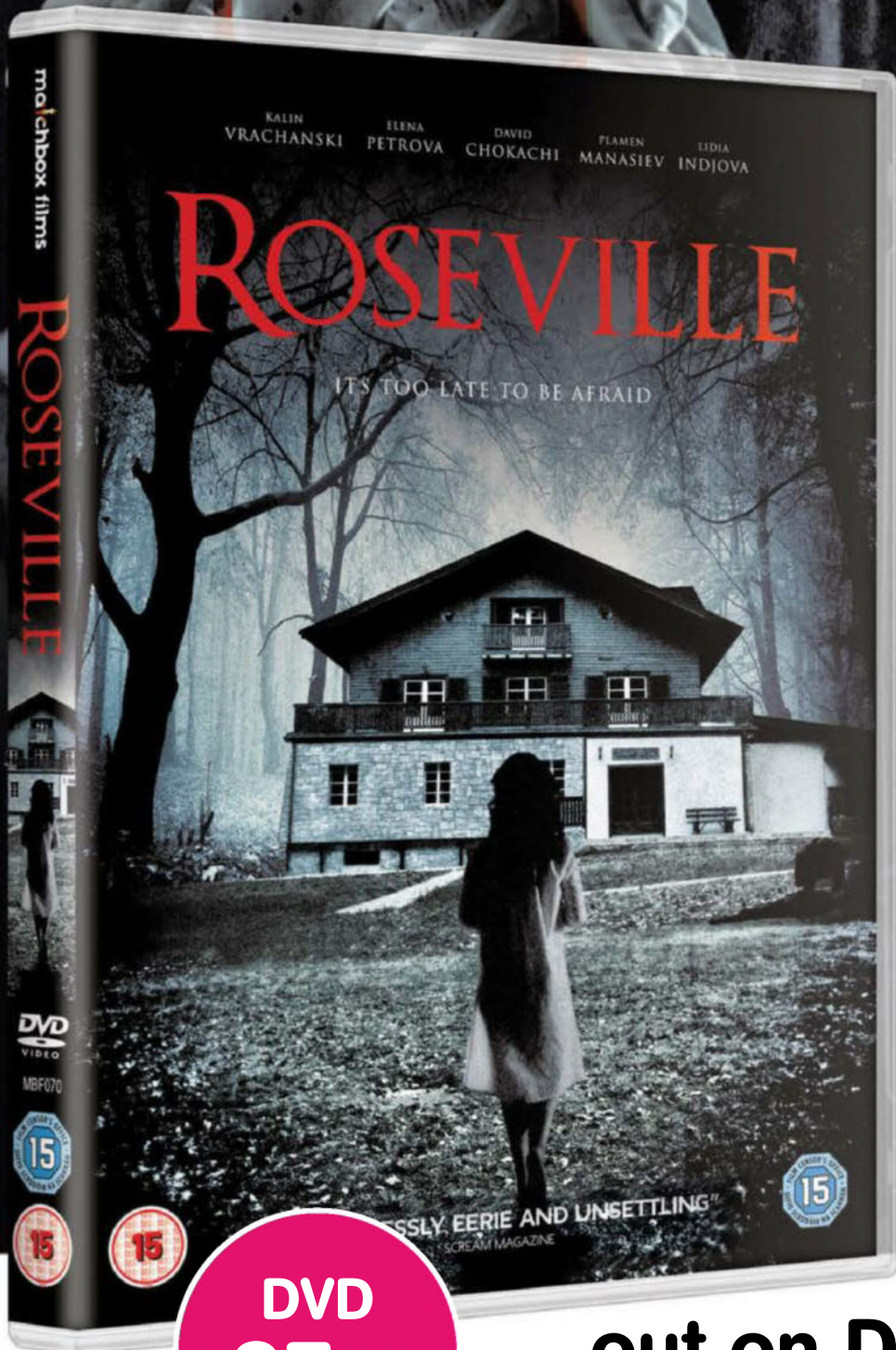


IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Parasite
Mira Grant
Familiarisation with the premise, plot and protagonists is essential.

matchbox films

IT'S TOO LATE TO BE AFRAID



**"RELENTLESSLY EERIE
AND UNSETTLING"**

SCREAM MAGAZINE

DVD
£7.99

**out on DVD
29 December**

hmv

f /hmv t @hmvtweets

Details Authors: George RR Martin, Elio M Garcia, Linda Antonsson/CA Taylor
Publishers: Harper Voyager/Gollancz Price: £30/£20 Released: Out now

THE WORLD OF ICE & FIRE/ INSIDE HBO'S GAME OF THRONES: SEASONS 3 & 4

**The Seven Kingdoms
sketched out**

Right when you want a decent *Song Of Ice And Fire*-inspired coffee-table read, two come along at once. That both are equally worthy reads in their own right stands as testament to the richness and depth of George RR Martin's fictional universe, as well as the efforts of those involved with making these slab-sized slices of literary stodge.

First up is the book that fans may recognise as the thing that has stopped Martin from finishing *The Winds Of Winter*: *The World Of Ice & Fire* ★★★★★. Written by Martin himself, it's a mecca for those who want to discover more about the First Men or delve into the intricacies of the Greyjoy family tree. With a number of nods that provide possible hints into the future of the series, it's definitely a success content-wise.

Ultimately, however, it's the art itself where it falls short. The captures of Westeros and its outlying lands are beautifully crafted enough, but arguably they're the wrong choices. Not enough of them encompass popular moments mentioned in the series that fans might have

liked to see, making it a bit of an anti-climax, at least in this respect.

Inside HBO's Game Of Thrones ★★★★★ takes a similar tack, but shares a similar weakness in its lack of visual splendour. To a large extent the show's aesthetics speak for themselves, but not enough of the images included here reveal much different, with many of them being stills from the show.

It makes up for this with its engaging content, with a large number of illuminating interviews from the cast and crew (a one-on-one with theme tune composer Ramin Djawadi is a particular highlight). All in all, there's a lot to like.

If you're a fan of the show, the books or both, there's something for everyone. Martin be praised...

Steve Wright



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

**Crazy 4 Cult: Movie Art
Gallery 1988**

For a collection of film and TV images to lose yourself in all day, very few other collections top this.



**"ALL IN
ALL,
THERE'S
A LOT
TO LIKE"**

Details Author: Anne Rice Publisher: Chatto & Windus
Price: £18.99 Released: Out now

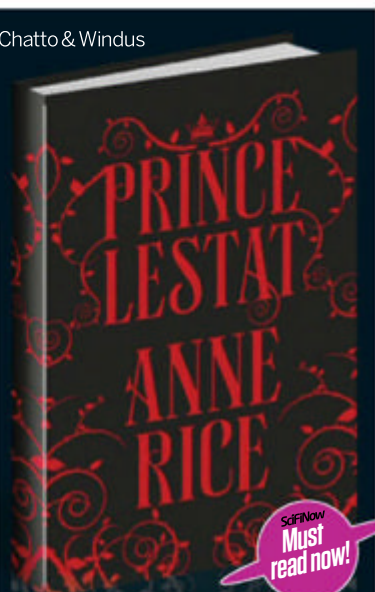
PRINCE LESTAT

**The Brat Prince
returns**

After an absence of over ten years, Anne Rice has returned to *The Vampire Chronicles*. An unseen voice is compelling elder vampires to turn against the newly turned. In the face of this seemingly unstoppable genocide, the elders must put aside their differences and work together.

This 11th book in the series makes no concessions for newbies, and will even challenge the Rice faithful as it spends roughly half of the book bringing us up to speed on the lives of not just Lestat, but the entire host of characters and some new arrivals.

However, for devotees of her writing, this is a welcome return to the luxurious, elegant world of these bloodsuckers, and Rice proves she's still more than capable of biting wit and some gruesome horror. It's fun to see



her use modern technology to play with some of her own rules and the stage is well set for further stories in this reinvigorated universe.

Self-indulgent? Sure, but if you've got rose-tinted memories of Lestat and co, this is a trip down memory lane that is worth taking.

Jonathan Hatfull

VERDICT ★★★★★

Details Author: James Luceno Publisher: Century
Price: £19.99 Released: Out now

STAR WARS: TARKIN

Grand Moff talkin'

Continuing the bold new direction of the *Star Wars* universe, *Expanded Universe* stalwart James Luceno makes a good fist at fleshing out one of the saga's most fearsome villains, a man even Darth Vader doffs his helmet to: Grand Moff Wilhuff Tarkin.

Chronicling his early life and trials on the planet Eriadu (essentially a world-sized version of Daily Mail Island from Charlie Brooker's *TV Go Home*), we see him go from local administrator and Imperial leading light to the second most powerful man in the universe. Enough information is given out in order to engage, while allowing the character so memorably played in *A New Hope* by Peter Cushing to retain his mystique, and by extension his gravitas.

Luceno knows the *Star Wars* universe inside out, and the

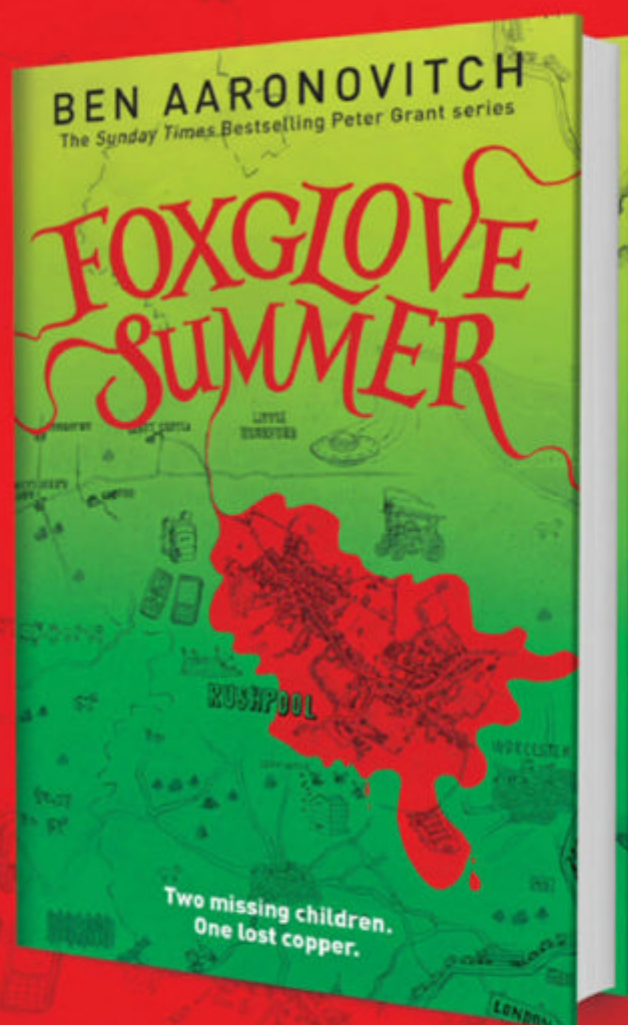


decision to give him the reins of one of its most under-seen characters ends up paying off. Coupled with nice little nods to his appearances in *The Clone Wars* TV series, Tarkin represents a step up for Lucas-inspired literature.

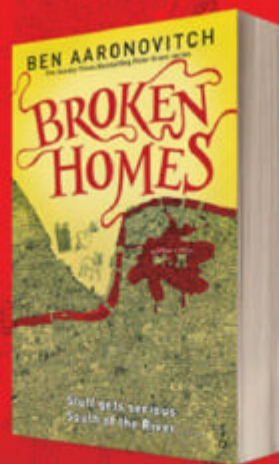
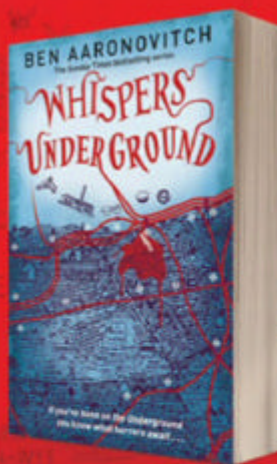
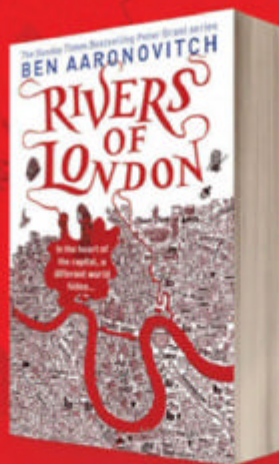
Steve Wright

VERDICT ★★★★★

Peter Grant: Back on the case but lost in the country.



Catch up with all of Peter's exploits
in the Peter Grant series



Details Writers: Jason Aaron, Mark Waid **Artists:** Mike Deodato Jr, Jim Cheung
Publisher: Marvel/Panini **Price:** £12.59 **Released:** Out now

ORIGINAL SIN

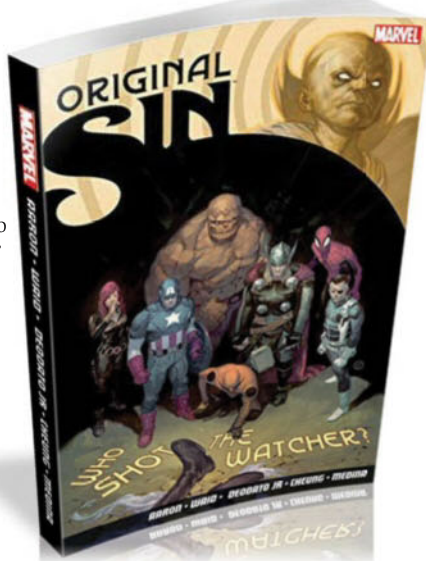
Sin from the heart

From the setup alone, it's hard not to think of Brad Meltzer and Rags Morales' *Identity Crisis*.

Like DC's 2004 shocking end of innocence, *Original Sin* sees the Marvel universe rocked by a murder most horrid (or in this case, unlikely) that the great and good throw all their resources at solving. Like *Identity Crisis*, it involves the Moon (the home of Uatu the Watcher, rather than the Justice League's airless clubhouse) and a brace of obscure villains (that would be telling).

That's really where the similarities end, as *Original Sin* sees Marvel playing to its strengths as heroes turn against one another (*Civil War*, *Avengers Vs X-Men*, *Fear Itself*) – always a treat for a publisher whose characters are defined by their flaws – and a wide-eyed youngster has a key role to play, in this case Sam Alexander's likeable Amblin-movie Nova, who steps into the Spider-Man-in-*Civil War* role. The setup is grand, but the bulk of the investigation barrels along at a strangely absurd pace, quickly segueing into the prerequisite epic superhero brawl in the streets of New York.

Meanwhile, back in space, a more interesting subplot develops, and some other superheroes get a chance to fight each other – the highlights of which are



the Punisher and Rocket Raccoon sizing each other up, and Ant-Man and Doctor Strange deciding they're above the need to measure hero-dicks ("Space ants, stand down").

Marvel has been just as guilty as DC of bringing out some dreadful event books, but the strength of Marvel's creators and properties – and the sheer love those creators invest in those properties – can elevate even the shadiest concept.

Even at its dullest, then, *Original Sin* is tremendous fun.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★☆☆



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

Powers: Who Killed Retro Girl?
 Brian Michael Bendis/Michael Avon Oeming
 The ultimate modern superhero whodunnit.



Details Writer: Dylan Horrocks **Artist:** Dylan Horrocks
Publisher: Knockabout Comics **Price:** £14.99 **Released:** Out now

SAM ZABEL AND THE MAGIC PEN

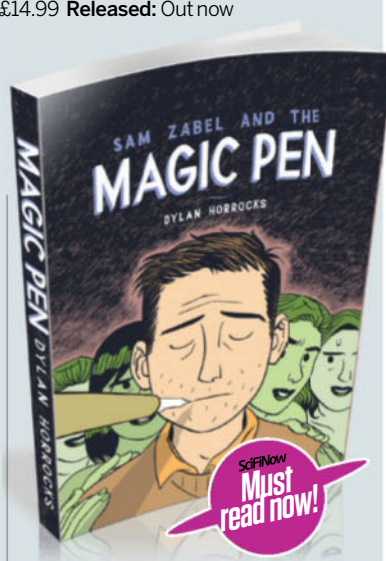
Face inward, True Believers

So softly does *Sam Zabel And The Magic Pen* set itself up you'll be wondering whether it is legitimately a part of genre – and not that nebulous and inconclusive beast, magical realism – well into its first third.

A stylish bandes dessinée-style volume from New Zealand artist/writer Dylan Horrocks (*Batgirl*, *Hunter: The Age Of Magic*), it starts as a semi-autobiographical daydream. It's tough not to hear the voice of a world-weary DC hack as Sam bemoans his writer's block and the demeaning expectations of Lady Night, a golden-age heroine transformed by "grim and gritty reboots".

This meta-textual tale journeys through the tropes and traditions of comics, from turn-of-the-century Edgar Rice Burroughs-inspired sci-fi pulp to tentacles-wagging hentai. Eventually, however, it reveals itself to be a full-blown quest through otherworlds on the hunt for a magical MacGuffin.

Like a more intimately focused and less oppressively epic take on Mike Carey and Peter Gross's *The Unwritten*, *Sam Zabel And The Magic Pen* is a similar exploration of that love triangle between reader, creator and creation. As



Zabel leaps between worlds with his new friends – web-comic fangirl Alice and sassy manga schoolgirl genius Miki – with the put-upon scowl of the everyman he overturns rocks to discover discussions on the role and depiction of women in comics, the responsibilities of a creator to his creation and the perils of fantasy.

Drawn in a lovely clean art style somewhere between the timeless purity of Hergé and the weary cool of *Ghost World*'s Daniel Clowes, the quiet simplicity of *Sam Zabel* makes a Trojan Horse of its real power to affect.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

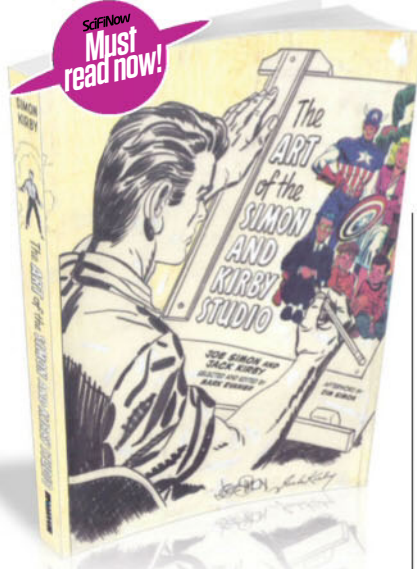
It's A Bird...
 Steven T Seagle/Teddy Kristiansen
 A writer struggles to get to grips with Superman.



Details Writer/Artists: Jack Kirby, Joe Simon **Editor:** Mark Evanier **Publisher:** Abrams ComicArts **Price:** £40 **Released:** Out now

THE ART OF THE SIMON AND KIRBY STUDIO

You don't know Jack



As a comic fan, it's very easy to feel as though you have an intimate relationship with Jack Kirby. You know his style so intimately that even considering his Silver Age hits, it's easy to forget that what you're seeing is an established and confident artist in the second half of his career. After all, by the time *Fantastic Four #1* hit the shelves in a blast of cosmic rays, he was already a 44-year-old father of four.

It's Kirby's partnership with Joe Simon – best known for creating *Captain America* in 1941 and later *Fighting American* in 1954 – that's the subject of this mammoth volume, which collects original artwork from Simon's archive, reproduced in intoxicating detail.

The Simon/Kirby team-up lasted from around 1940 to 1975 on and off, and *The Art Of The Simon And Kirby Studio* leans heavily on this first period, from the heights of the Golden Age to their pioneering exploration of romance comics and leap onto the emerging western, horror, crime and sci-fi genres that exploded out of the post-war carcass of the jingoistic superhero. They never truly gave up on superheroes, and there's art for concepts that never got off the ground – like *Sunfire: Man Of Flame*, and the short-lived likes of *Adventures Of The Fly* – that has some parentage with Kirby's later Marvel creation (with Stan Lee and Steve Ditko) *Spider-Man*, and DC's off-kilter *The Sandman*, later immortalised by his tragic cameo in Neil Gaiman's series. They're certainly no sillier than anything that did take off, underlining the importance of either a first-class



showman like Stan Lee or a first-class business model like DC Comics.

The romance comics are a particular fascination – unlike the pair's war comic *Foxhole*, which comes from a place of very real intensity – the sheer skill with which they tap into a teen market is staggering. It's also a delight watching Kirby's art style come to the fore, albeit a poignant one, as it leaves Simon far behind. As jaws become squarer, splash pages more daring and action scenes more dynamic, you can see where the road forks and one man kick-starts the Marvel Comics revolution while another hones his publishing skills in other fields.

Viewing some of the really early work in detail is a strange experience if you're not used to the idea of being unable to instantly spot Jack Kirby's influence. Kirby and Simon frequently swapped roles, leaping from covers to pencils to inks to story and back again – it'll turn your eyes red raw trying to pick out that idiosyncratic lantern jaw and angular downturned mouth.

It turns out that you don't know Jack, and it's more than worth your time putting that right.

James Hoare

VERDICT ★★★★★



IF YOU LIKE THIS TRY...

New Gods: Artist Edition

Jack Kirby

This prestige format hardcover is the perfect way to discover Kirby's final epic.

60 SECONDS WITH SUNNY LIEW



Are you surprised to see the *Liquid City* anthology get into its third volume?

I'm not sure 'surprised' is exactly the right sentiment – there's always blind faith

involved when you put a book together that'll become the best-seller of all time! Of course, that's tempered by all sorts of fears, and sometimes I feel like I'm swinging between those two poles.

The series was always meant to do two things: help raise awareness of comics creators from south-east Asia to a wider reading public, and foster a community among the creators. I think we've been able to do a little of both, and for me, getting to bring together artists from different countries has probably been the most rewarding aspect.

***Malinky Robot* is a uniquely warm dystopia. Where did that 'lived in' charm come from?**

I think *Malinky Robot* always aimed at combining the lived-in feel of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* with the offbeat storytelling in more independent comics and cinema. A lot of the background was also inspired by a book by Edward Fowler called *San'ya Blues*, where he describes time he spent amongst workers in the district of San'ya in Tokyo. They represented sort of an antithesis to the modern, shiny version of Japan, with most of the denizens working as construction workers, often estranged from their families and mainstream Japanese life.

That aside, I wanted to tell stories that captured the feelings and textures of moments in life – a bicycle ride, a lunch with friends, just talking and walking. So they tend to be loosely plotted affairs, with a focus on small details.

How do you get those lovely idiosyncratic details in *Malinky Robot*?

Just the usual – thumbnails, pencils, final art. The look of the stories was sort of a happy result of necessity back then – I'd not yet acquired any level of skill in inking, and felt much more comfortable rendering the final art in pencils. As it turned out, that led to a rather nice feel to the stories, and it's an approach I still use occasionally.

I've always loved the jumble, nooks and crannies of cities; the overhanging wires, neon signs, even the dirt and grime to some degree. And setting the story in a sci-fi world gave me free rein to combine all sorts of things and places, so you'll see elements in there from Japan, Malaysia,

Singapore and South Korea – an amalgam of Asian cities.



Liquid City: Volume Three and *Malinky Robot* are both available now from Image Comics

“JAWS BECOME SQUARER, SPLASH PAGES MORE DARING”



75 YEARS of MARVEL

from the GOLDEN AGE
to the SILVER SCREEN
by Roy Thomas



HISTORY LESSONS

In the Seventies, Roy Thomas became Marvel's first editor-in-chief after Stan Lee, making him the ideal candidate to write a new book about the company's 75-year history. We spoke to him about a life shaping the future of Marvel...

WORDS CHRIS ANDERSON



Thanks to Marvel Studios, millions of people are now familiar with characters that even just a few years ago would have been considered too risky for a film franchise. Those with a more established success record, such as Spider-Man and the X-Men, still command a following, and even creator Stan Lee has acquired celebrity status, with his signature film cameos and even his own convention.

Such is the company's appeal that US TV channel ABC recently screened a one-hour documentary, *Marvel 75 Years: From Pulp To Pop!* to honour it reaching an important anniversary, while book publisher Taschen has contributed its own celebration in the form of a 720-page hardcover, *75*



Years Of Marvel: From The Golden Age To The Silver Screen. A tome worthy of the famous 'mighty Marvel' moniker, it has been written by former editor-in-chief – and in the early Seventies, the first successor to Stan Lee – Roy Thomas, who tells its story from its humble beginnings in 1939 through to its major reinvention in the Sixties, right up to becoming the powerhouse it is today.

Helped by editor Josh Baker, Thomas has assembled nearly 2,000 photographs of vintage comic-books, original artwork, toys and collectables, as well as a four-foot fold-out timeline and biographies of key creators. Thomas' Marvel career began in 1965 as a writer, producing memorable runs on both the *X-Men* and *The Avengers*, with a hand in creating characters like Ultron, the Vision and Wolverine. We spoke to him about his life, career and Stan Lee.

Your book details 75 years of Marvel Comics history. How did it all begin?

It began with Martin Goodman, who published pulp magazines from around 1933, and switched to comics in 1939. The company was called Timely Publications back then, and didn't change its name to Marvel until later, but you can see the first use of the word on the cover of *Marvel Science Stories*, a pulp magazine from 1938, later called *Marvel Tales*. Goodman must have liked it because *Marvel Comics* #1 came out in 1939, and was the book that introduced the original Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner. It was a huge hit.

You were born in 1940, so do you remember those early comics?

From the age of about five, I started to become interested in comic-books, especially *Superman*, *Batman* and *All-Star Comics* – which featured the Justice Society of America – followed closely by *The Human Torch*, *Sub-Mariner* and *Captain America* at Timely, and of course *Captain Marvel* [Shazam], but I would read any I could get my hands on. By the mid-Forties, when I started reading, superheroes were beginning to fade out, so Timely had only kept the three I mentioned, but I am vaguely aware of others that it published, such as Miss America, and later Sun Girl, Venus and Marvel Boy.

So if superheroes weren't popular, what was Timely doing instead?

It was trying to branch out – it released a lot of funny comics, Westerns and then war comics in the Fifties. By then, the superheroes were mostly gone, but hardly missed, I'm sure, by the writers and artists in general. I do remember the first Captain America revival of the early Fifties, though, introducing him as a 'commie-smasher', and I loved it. I've always thought the Soviet-controlled communists made as good a set of villains as the Nazis.

Was your joy of comics affected by the general view in the Fifties that they were



Thomas at his desk at Marvel.

➤ **bad for children? People had comic-book burnings, is that right?**

My parents never stopped me from reading comics. I did once have to donate some comics to a bonfire in Jackson, Missouri, during the height of that period in my junior high days. I just remember a big pile of them there on the grounds of the parish hall, but I actually managed to sneak home a few from Ziff Davis, whose painted covers appealed to me, such as *Wild Boy Of The Congo* and *Space Busters*.

A lot of companies went out of business. What happened to those that survived?

They got watered down, because if they did anything that wasn't approved of by the Comics Code Authority [an organisation set up to monitor content], they had to change it. So what you got – and what was in place for many years, well into my time and beyond – was self-censorship.

So how did we go from that to the re-emergence of the superhero in the Sixties?

Julie Schwartz at DC helped to revive a bunch of its old superheroes in new costumes, starting in 1956, and Archie Comics had *The Fly* by 1959, so it made sense for Marvel to try it again too. But this time, as he's often said, Stan Lee told Goodman he wanted to do it "his way" – and he was teamed with the equally great

Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko, and the three of them changed comics for the better.

It really had that much of an impact?

I bought *Fantastic Four* from issue #1, and there was just something different and offbeat about them and the other characters, Spider-Man in particular. Thor and Ant-Man were less revolutionary – more like DC characters – but they were good too. When I read DC comics, I usually felt that I had to go into the mindset of being a kid again, but with Marvel it was just a little more sophisticated.

You started with the company in 1965, and you had a hand in creating characters. What was that like?

Fun, although I avoided co-creating too many heroes, as I knew I wouldn't own them. Had I known that one day Marvel would arrange a fairer distribution of funds, I'd have created a lot more. But a number of the notions I co-created were done as editor; characters like Wolverine, Brother Voodoo, Werewolf by Night, Man-Thing, Marvel's Dracula, even to some extent Luke Cage. Some were my idea, some were Stan's, and I would develop them and turn them over to a writer. Occasionally, I couldn't resist co-creating a new character – like Iron Fist – or I'd come up with a new character with an old name, like the Vision.

Iron Man was just one of the many characters that Thomas worked on.

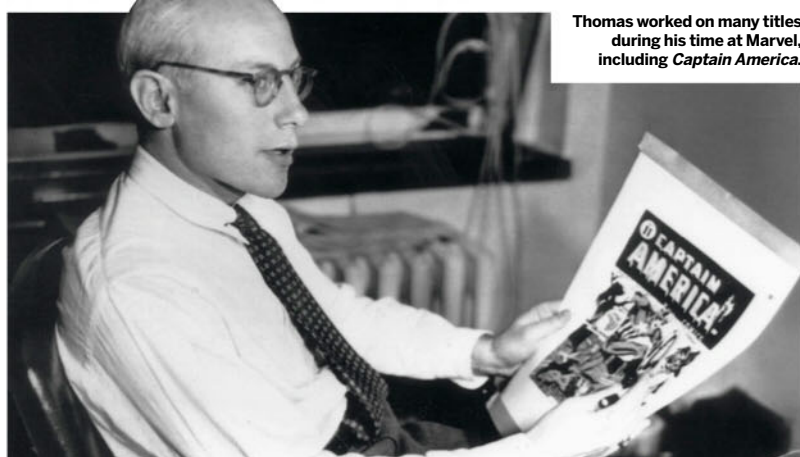


75 Years Of Marvel includes many of Thomas' collected pictures.



“WHEN I READ DC COMICS, I USUALLY FELT THAT I HAD TO GO INTO A MINDSET OF BEING A KID AGAIN”

ROY THOMAS



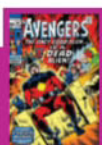
Thomas worked on many titles during his time at Marvel, including *Captain America*.

ROY WONDER

We take a look at the career highlights of Roy Thomas, the comic-book legend

THE KREE/SKRULL WAR
AVENGERS #89-97
(1971)

The Avengers intervene in a cosmic battle between the Skrull and Kree races, with Sal Buscema, John Buscema and Neal Adams providing the art for a truly epic storyline.



A MONSTER CALLED... MORBIUS
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #101-102
(1971)

Thomas was the first writer to work on the main *Spider-Man* book other than Stan Lee, with his first issue addressing why Peter Parker had grown four extra arms.



THE SONG OF RED SONJA
CONAN THE BARBARIAN #24
(1973)

After introducing Conan to comics, Thomas was able to add creator Robert E Howard's female warrior Red Sonja, who would later spin off into her own solo series.





The 75 Years Of Marvel book includes all your favourite characters.



Many of the original covers will feature in the book.

What was Stan Lee like to work with? And how about Jack Kirby and Steve Ditko?

Stan isn't perfect; no one is. But he was great to work with and a wonderful teacher, even when he wasn't really trying to be. I liked Jack, but never had much to do with him. Steve was distant, but we were friendly, and he once came to a party at the apartment I lived in, several years after he'd left Marvel. John Romita, Marie Severin, Herb Trimpe and Sol Brodsky, they were a great crew, but my favourite all-time collaborator was probably John Buscema.

How did you go about bringing the rights to Conan to Marvel Comics?

Conan and his world are a wonderful concept, and [artist] Barry Smith and I did such a good job of bringing it to comics, ditto Gil Kane and John Buscema later. Why be overly modest? It didn't succeed because we did a lousy job, right?

Your fondness for the Golden Age was evident in the creation of *The Invaders*. Was that a highlight for you?

The Invaders was never a big hit, but it did okay. I thought it was a good way for me to write characters I loved, like the original Torch, Cap and Namor, without having to co-ordinate them with other comics. I was tired of being involved in the day-to-day Marvel universe, even though I'd done a fair amount to help solidify it.

You served as editor-in-chief from 1972-74. What was your focus then?

Mostly, we had to grow. My move to editor-in-chief and Stan's to publisher coincided with our mutual desire to try different genres. Marvel became the top comics company during that period, though due more to Stan and other factors. But I like to think I did my part to help it along. Sometimes I wish I'd stayed around longer

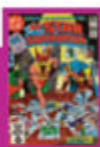
THE TRIUMPH OF MAGNETO UNCANNY X-MEN #60-63 (1979)

A strange time in the X-Men's history, when the title faced cancellation. But that didn't stop Thomas and artist Neal Adams producing great work.



RETURN TO THE GOLDEN AGE ALL-STAR SQUADRON #1-3 (1981)

After moving to DC, Thomas got to explore his love of the company's Golden Age characters, launching an *All-Star* series set in the Forties.



THE GENERATIONS SAGA INFINITY INC #1-10 (1984)

Also at DC, Thomas span another series out of the *All-Star Squadron*, bringing a team together based on the heroes' offspring, created with artist Jerry Ordway.



as editor-in-chief, but I did a lot of other interesting things with my life after I left the job, so I can't really regret that.

You continued to write for Marvel, but later joined DC. How did the two companies compare?

I didn't want to work for Marvel if I couldn't continue to edit my own work, so when I got stonewalled, I left. DC did some great books in the Eighties – *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* – but they're not to my taste, especially the latter. I find things I like, but they're not for me, despite my respect for their creators.

With Marvel's movie success, is it exciting to see your creations come to life?

Yes, especially seeing the Vision. What I've seen so far of the next *Avengers* movie [*Age Of Ultron*] makes me think I might like it nearly as much as – or even more than – the first, and I liked that one a lot. It's one of the few movies in recent years I've actually seen more than once.



75 Years Of Marvel: From The Golden Age To The Silver Screen by Roy Thomas and Josh Baker is available now, published by Taschen, RRP £135.

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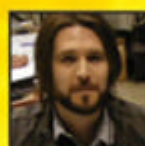
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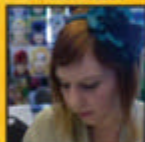
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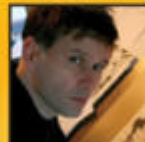
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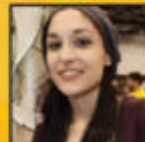
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BUDDY IN OUR
XMAS QUIZ? **126**

COMPLETE GUIDE

"I WANT TO PLAY A GAME"

EVERY SAW FILM
COMPILED IN GRISLY
DETAIL **110**

AN IMAGINE
MONTHLY

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO **SAW**

IN 2004, A MICRO-BUDGET HORROR MOVIE BECAME AN INTERNATIONAL SENSATION AND CHANGED THE LANDSCAPE OF THE GENRE. TEN YEARS LATER, SCIFINOW LOOKS BACK AT HOW THE SAW FRANCHISE CREATED AN ICON AND SPARKED YEARS OF CONTROVERSY...

WORDS JONATHAN HATFULL, SARAH DOBBS INTERVIEWS JONATHAN HATFULL

True horror icons don't come along very often. After the glut that brought us Freddy Krueger, Jason Voorhees, Michael Myers and Pinhead in the Eighties, it seemed like the last gasp of the pop-culture boogeyman might have been *Scream's* self-referential *Ghostface*. Then, in 2004, a micro-budget thriller made by two 27-year-old Australians introduced us to a human monster with a fiendishly clever and brutally violent plan. "I want to play a game," intoned Jigsaw. As it turned out, so did we.

Over the course of seven years, director James Wan and writer/star Leigh Whannell's creation would change the landscape of popular horror. We saw an apparent trend for brutally violent and confrontational films hitting cinema screens, including *Hostel*, *The Devil's Rejects* and *Wolf Creek*, which would be grouped together as a movement decried as 'torture porn' or 'gorno'. However, these labels didn't matter to its audiences, who flocked to watch the latest in the incredibly labyrinthine series year after year.

"It's an incredible thing, and that's a testament to James and Leigh for having conceived the whole idea and followed through with their vision and their passion," star of the original movie Cary Elwes tells us, contemplating the impact of ten years of *Saw*. "Every single studio turned them down."

Wan and Whannell's idea saw two men trapped by a serial killer who forced his victims to brave horrific traps in order to earn their freedom. The subjects of his

games would be those who did not appreciate the gift of life, or who actively made life worse for others. If they wanted to survive, they would have to put themselves through a great deal of pain in order to prove that they had the will to do so. The pair arrived in LA with a script – the caveat being that Wan would direct and Whannell would star – and a test reel showcasing the reverse-bear trap sequence that would stun producers.

"People describe them as overnight successes, but there is no such thing," Elwes says "They came fresh

out of film school in Melbourne, but they had studied and worked their butts off to get to that point where they could make the film they wanted to make, and they were going to make it come heck or high water. That's why they conceived of two actors chained to the wall; they couldn't afford more than one set."

That test reel came to the attention of producers Gregg Hoffman, Mark Burg and Oren Koules, who scrounged up a budget of \$1.2 million and gave the pair the creative control they craved. Elwes and ➤



The first film was produced on a low budget, and set for large periods in just one room.



COMPLETE GUIDE TO SAW

Whannell starred as Lawrence and Adam, two men chained up in a room with a dead body between them. A recorded instruction from notorious killer Jigsaw tells Lawrence he's got to kill Adam before the clock runs out, or his family will be murdered. There's a pair of hacksaws that won't cut through the chains, but they might just cut through bone. Can the two men find a way out before they're forced to do the unthinkable?

"We shot in 18 days," remembers Elwes. "There were no chairs on the set, I can never remember anyone sitting down; there was no time for that. I was learning about 12 pages of dialogue a day."

"HE KEPT JOURNALS, AND HE WOULD SHAPE A NEW LAYER TO JOHN KRAMER"

MARCUS DUNSTAN

That lightning-fast shoot created some problems in the editing bay. Kevin Greutert, who edited every *Saw* film until he directed *Saw VI*, worked with Wan to fill in the gaps, and ended up creating the series' iconic and frenetic style. "They never had an opportunity to shoot interstitial scenes like cops driving from the police station to the warehouse," he explains. "So we had to go out and use a still camera to get shots of warehouses and police stations and turn them into a crazy montage sequence out of stills. The effect was low-budget, but it was also really energetic, so we continued to utilise that in the later *Saws*, even though we had more money."

With the finished film put together in January 2004, *Saw* went to the Sundance Film Festival to face

the industry. "I was there at Sundance when the film premiered," remembers Greutert, "and you could just tell from the audience's response that this little movie we'd been working on, not even sure if it would ever get a release, was indeed the real thing."

Saw was set for a Halloween release date, and the buzz began to build about this gruesome low-budget horror that shocked Park City. Meanwhile, a script called *The Desperate* from rookie filmmaker Darren Lynn Bousman found its way to Hoffman, who realised that it would be perfect for a possible *Saw* sequel. Bousman worked with Whannell to make it fit (Wan stayed on as producer), while *Saw*'s theatrical release proved that Sundance wasn't a fluke. Some took issue with the movie's enthusiasm for torture and similarities to David Fincher's *Se7en*, but it still grossed over \$100

million worldwide. Meanwhile, *Saw II* was confirmed for a Halloween 2005 release date.

Making good on the promise of its 'There will be blood' tagline, *Saw II* offered more gore, more blood, more traps, more back story, more Jigsaw and more victims to play his brutal games with. It also gives a lot more screen-time to Tobin Bell's John Kramer, the man revealed at the first film's finale to be cancer-ridden mastermind Jigsaw, as he torments Donnie Wahlberg's violent cop Eric Matthews. In true horror boogeyman tradition, the villain became the star. "That's Tobin all the way," enthuses Marcus Dunstan, who went on to write *Saws IV-VII* with Patrick Melton. "Tobin kept hand-written journals, and he would shape a new layer to John Kramer with every single instalment. He would always stick with the centre point

Jigsaw's little helper, Billy the puppet, delivers bad news.



Danny Glover gave the first *Saw* some acting clout.

Dr Lawrence Gordon (Cary Elwes) runs out of time in *Saw*.



TOP 10 SAW TRAPS

The Saw movies are renowned for the inventive traps Jigsaw forces his victims to fight their way through. Here are the ten best:



10. THE BLADE TABLE

FILM: SAW V

The final trap in Saw V's maze requires ten pints of blood to open the door. It's manageable if there are five of you – but a bit trickier if there are only two. A lot of blood has got to be spilled.



9. THE FLAMMABLE JELLY

FILM: SAW

To punish a disability-faking programmer, Jigsaw injects him with poison, locks the antidote in a safe, smears him with napalm, and gives him a candle to read the safe's combination with. Nasty.



8. THE CUBE

FILM: SAW V

Poor old Agent Strahm gets too close to Jigsaw's accomplice, and ends up with his head locked in a box full of water. Luckily, he has a pen in his pocket for an emergency tracheotomy. Gruesome.



7. THE ANGEL

FILM: SAW III

Probably the franchise's most unfair trap, the Angel requires Agent Kerry to retrieve a key from a vat of acid to free herself. But as it's rigged, the key doesn't work, and she dies anyway.



6. THE GLASS COFFIN

FILM: SAW V

After surviving one glass box trap, Strahm isn't keen to get into another one. Unfortunately for him, the coffin is the only safe place in a room with moving walls.



5. THE PIG VAT

FILM: SAW III

Drowning is a nasty way to die; drowning in mushed-up pig carcasses is worse. Lots of the Saw traps will make you wince, but the thought of this one might actually make you sick.



4. THE SAW

FILM: SAW

It's the one the franchise is named for, and one of the simplest dilemmas: would you saw off your own foot for a chance to escape a slow death?



3. THE CAROUSEL

FILM: SAW VI

Six victims, four bullets: the only way to survive this trap is to convince your boss to stab himself to save you over your colleagues. It's likely the worst employee bonding session ever.



2. THE NEEDLE PIT

FILM: SAW II

Although this trap isn't as deadly as some of the others, there's something horrifying about the idea of having to dig through thousands of dirty syringes to find a key.



1. THE REVERSE BEAR TRAP

FILMS: SAW, SAW VI, SAW 3D

It's the one you think of first when you think 'Saw trap', and it's brilliant. The trap fits onto the victim's head, and if it's not unlocked in time, rips their face off. Arghhh.

of: this is a well-intended Zen practice presented in the most severe way!"

With nearly a \$150 million worldwide gross from a budget of \$4 million, the *Saw* franchise was set to continue, and the film-a-year production schedule was established. Whannell, Wan and Bousman had decided to bow out, but when Hoffman suddenly passed away, the trio decided to make *Saw III* in tribute. The torture in the film is more emotional than physical, although there's plenty of both. Jigsaw and his faithful but troubled acolyte Amanda (Shawnee Smith) play out their twisted familial drama. The deaths of both characters gave the film a shocking finale, but where the hell could the series go from here?

"I REMEMBER THE LOOK ON THE FACE OF OUR AGENT – HE WAS SO DISTURBED!"

MARCUS DUNSTAN

Although Bousman would eventually decide to return as director, Whannell had counted himself out for *Saw IV*, and the hunt was on for writers. Dunstan and Melton were looking for a studio for their serial-killer horror *The Collector*, but instead got an offer to pitch *Saw IV*. Jumping at the chance, they quickly found themselves in the midst of the chaos. "They were in the middle of editing *Saw III*," Melton tells us. "We saw a version where they showed Donnie Wahlberg getting killed, then we saw a version where he didn't. When we started writing, our lead character for *Saw IV* was going to be Donnie Wahlberg. Then, as always with *Saw*, certain actors were like, 'Wait, this made like \$150 million worldwide, and I'm getting paid what?' So when we came on, it was still very fluid in terms of who was alive, who wasn't alive and what was going to happen."

Still, in spite of all the chaos, Dunstan and Melton were thrilled to join a series at the peak of its powers.



Amanda (Shawnee Smith) goes through hell in *Saw II*.

"The night of the *Saw III* premiere, there was this very tense silence in the room when the logo came up," Dunstan remembers. "There was unease and excitement like you were reaching the very tip-top of rollercoaster for a thrill-ride down. You were getting a ticket to a horror event in a way, and that was really cool. I remember the look on the face of our agent at the time – he just looked so disturbed! It was great!"

Excitement aside, the duo of new writers soon realised that Whannell hadn't made things easy for them. "He killed all his characters!" laughs Melton. "Hey guys, welcome! I killed off the lead character, his apprentice and pretty much everyone else, so good luck! Oh yeah, there's a guy in the second scene who you may recognise – Costas [Mandylor] – do something with that!"

While Tobin Bell's Jigsaw would continue to play a huge part throughout the rest of the series in the form of flashbacks and voiceovers, *Saw IV* introduced two duelling cops: Lieutenant Mark Hoffman (Costas Mandylor), who made a brief appearance in *Saw III*, and FBI Agent Peter Strahm (Scott Patterson), one of who would be revealed as Jigsaw's successor. It was becoming apparent that this was a franchise that would reward the faithful viewer, as the tiniest clues would become vitally important further down the line. "I think only when it came to *Saw VII* was there invention on the fly," Dunstan tells us. "The other ones, it's almost as if the production said, 'Alright, we've really got to have these things down, because while those other ones turned out well, it's much more fun if we go in with a battle plan.'"

TOP MINOR CHARACTERS

Here are five of the best supporting cast members...



1. Zep Hindle

Played by: Michael Emerson
Appearances: *Saw*

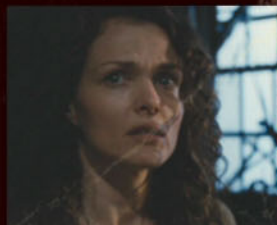
An orderly in the hospital where John Kramer was being treated, Zep initially seems a candidate for Jigsaw's true identity. But no, it turns out he's just one of Jigsaw's many accomplices. He's only in one film, but the iconic *Saw* theme is named 'Hello Zep' after him.



2. Lawrence Gordon

Played by: Cary Elwes
Appearances: *Saw*, *Saw 3D*

Apparently Jigsaw didn't like Dr Gordon's bedside manner, because he ended up in the *Saw* trap. The survival instinct that led him to chop off his own foot also saw him become a Jigsaw apprentice, revealing himself in the final film.



3. Allison Kerry

Played by: Dina Meyer
Appearances: *Saw*, *Saw II*, *Saw III*, *Saw IV*

Kerry was one of the few detectives in the franchise who actually did police work without planting evidence or murdering people. Unfortunately, Jigsaw decided she was "dead on the inside", and put her in a trap.



4. Lindsay Perez

Played by: Athena Karkanis
Appearances: *Saw IV*, *Saw V*, *Saw VI*

An FBI agent assigned to the Jigsaw case after the original detectives have all been killed or brainwashed, Perez survives several traps, only to get stabbed when she solved the case. No competent detective lives long in this franchise.



5. Pamela Jenkins

Played by: Samantha Lemole
Appearances: *Saw V*, *Saw VI*

Tabloid journalist Pamela probably should have known better than to write too much about the Jigsaw killer. Her aggressive interview techniques and sensationalised stories get her thrown into a trap, where she's forced to watch her brother die.



Saw II introduced Donnie Wahlberg's Eric Matthews.



The second film also ramped up the traps and gore.



The series saw Tobin Bell's John Kramer become a horror icon.

With its bold tagline, 'If it's Halloween, it must be Saw', the latest instalment reinforced the continuing power of the franchise. *Saw IV* was still tightly bound to the previous films, hinging on the fact that the viewer doesn't realise that the film's game is happening at the same time as the events in *Saw III* until the finale. The international box office was down to \$140 million – still enough for work to quickly begin on *Saw V*, and with Bousman bowing out, production designer David Hackl was given the chance to direct. "It was a real challenge to write, shoot and edit a film every year!" laughs Greutert. "No question. There's no other horror series I'm aware of that's done it, and it's hard. You have to be very focused. That's part of why the producers always went out of their way to bring back as many members of the team year after year as they could."

Jeff (Angus MacFadyen) confronts the past in *Saw III*.



Saw III left Kerry (Dina Meyer) with no way out.

CREATING A HORROR ICON

The story of the making of Billy the puppet

Jason's hockey mask, Dracula's widows' peak, Michael Myers's misshapen Shatner mask: there are some images in horror movies that become classics. The *Saw* movies added a new image to the pantheon.

Never named on screen, the ventriloquist's doll that Jigsaw uses to deliver messages to his victims is often dubbed 'Jigsaw', but he's actually called Billy. The original Billy puppet was built by *Saw* director James Wan out of everyday household items like clay, papier-mâché and ping-pong balls. Along with the original version of the reverse bear-trap, Billy was built so that Wan and fellow *Saw* creator Leigh Whannell could shoot a proof-of-concept short to try to sell their movie. Budget constraints being what they were, that same doll was used for the first film.

By the time *Saw II* rolled around, though, there was a bit more spare cash hanging around, so a new and improved Billy was built. Billy 2.0 had remote-control eyes and a mechanised mouth, making him much more expressive than the original one, and additionally creepy.

More Billys followed, including one fitted with magnets to keep him on his tricycle for *Saw III*, and an exploding one for *Saw IV*. An alternate, less scary Billy was also built for a flashback scene in *Saw IV*. A not-yet-serial-killing John Kramer apparently built a cute spiral-cheeked doll as a gift for his unborn son. When that son was miscarried, John became Jigsaw, and Billy took on a far more sinister look.

The puppet has appeared on all sorts of *Saw* memorabilia over the years, from bobbleheads to coasters, but the original prop still belongs to James Wan. He sits in Wan's spare bedroom, ready to scare unsuspecting guests.

Going from victim to apprentice, Amanda is deadly in *Saw III*.



COMPLETE GUIDE TO SAW

"There was a certain date – it was right around Halloween – when the marketing started kicking up on the previous movie, then people had to focus because we had to be in production by January," remembers Melton. "So people knew they couldn't fuck around. It was good. Nine out of ten times people are just fucking around."

Saw V saw Strahm trying to catch Hoffman, now revealed as Kramer's surviving apprentice, while an unrelated group of victims went through their traps. Without the elaborate time-structure twist of Saw IV, V felt routine, but the series would then deliver its strongest sequel as Greutert made his directorial debut. Saw VI gives us more of Hoffman and Amanda together during their apprenticeship with Jigsaw, but it's the trap plot, in which health insurance executive William (Peter Outerbridge) is forced to confront how much a human life means, that sets it apart. With pitch-black humour and social commentary, Saw VI felt fresh and relevant.

"Frankly, healthcare wasn't as much of a hot-button issue in the United States when we wrote and made

the film," reveals Greutert. "But the movie came out right around the time that Obama was elected and started talking about healthcare. It turns some people off, because people who are anti-national healthcare thought the movie had some axe to grind. It was more about the insurance companies, but people assume that if there's a social issue coming from a Hollywood movie then it's going to be on the liberal side!"

"By the sixth one we had a lot of rope, and that was terrific," Melton tells us. "The fourth one was deemed too Byzantine, and then V was deemed too simple. By the sixth one, the alchemy really came together the best, because we learned a couple of lessons. We had to learn it on the fly, and then kaboom, it came together. That's also a large credit to Kevin Greutert. He created it just beautifully."

However, it was clear that the box-office gross for the series was trending downward. The time had come to say goodbye to Jigsaw with a 3D final instalment, but it wouldn't go smoothly. "We originally conceived the final Saw to be Saw VII and VIII, two movies back to back,

and then that got changed into one!" explains Melton. "There were certain things that I don't think quite got where they needed to be."

Saw VII was particularly difficult for Greutert, who found himself in the middle of a well-publicised tug of war between the producers and the makers of the new low-budget horror sensation on the block: *Paranormal Activity*. "To say it was difficult is an understatement," he laughs. "That was really the worst experience in my life. I hate to say it, it was a bad way for me to end my time with the series, but it was something that the producers chose to do against my will. Marcus and Patrick were doing the best they could under the circumstances, but to be honest, the last film was kind of a cash-grab, and I certainly felt like VI should have been the last one in the series."

"They had an option in my contract to do an additional film with me, and once I got hired to do *Paranormal Activity 2*, they thought they could stop it. I arrived in Toronto just days before the film started shooting in 3D, and I had to make all those

"WE HAD TO LEARN IT ON THE FLY, AND THEN KABOOM, IT CAME TOGETHER"

PATRICK MELTON



Jigsaw's twisted torch is passed on to Hoffman (Costas Mandylor).



Saw 3D sees Linkin Park singer Chester Bennington appear.



Time had run out for the franchise with Saw 3D.



Agent Strahm (Scott Patterson) on the case.

adjustments, and it was hard. It was emotionally devastating, and just a real challenge to spend nine months doing something that two days before you had no idea you'd be doing. I did as much as I could in the few days that I had to try and make the film more my own, but it was not really possible. I like to think that the film was a lot better than it would have been if I hadn't directed it, but who the heck knows."

Saw 3D would draw damning reviews (many pointing out the unpleasant misogynistic undertones), and with the burgeoning success of the *Paranormal Activity* franchise, it was clear that the public was no longer excited by the grisly delights offered by Jigsaw and company. "Once *Saw* was over, it was o-ver!" laughs Greutert. "Once it ended it was done, and people quickly moved on to ghost movies and found-footage films. There were definitely some imitators, but really there haven't been any hits that I'm aware of since *Saw*. Perhaps that kind of thing will come back, but I feel like its time has passed by several years."

Wan and Whannell have found success with PG-13 horrors such as *Insidious* (Wan also went solo with the massively successful *The Conjuring*), but the distaste for 'torture porn' and its parade of sadistic grotesquerie can still be felt today. The name is synonymous with horror as a lower art form, with Joss Whedon singling the movement out for derision while promoting *The Cabin In The Woods*. "I've always resented the term 'torture porn'," Greutert tells us. "Because people use x-porn for indicating lots of things that don't have to do with pornography! Obviously, the [*Saw*] films don't really have a sexual element at all, even in the ones that have nudity, so it's a misnomer."

Indeed, Melton has points out that the early 21st Century trend for violent, gruesome adult horror produced some exceptional work. "It was just a neat time when *H Hostel* and the first *Saw* came out, *High*

Tension, *Wolf Creek*," he remembers. "It was a really fun time for horror. Right now, everyone seems to think it has to be a PG-13 supernatural movie that's shot for \$3 million and using one location, and it's all a lot of the same shock scares that we've seen before. I've heard that there may be a new *Saw* coming out. I know Lionsgate's working on something."

Whether or not Jigsaw returns, the impact of the film and the legacy of the franchise remain undiminished. During its run, it defined the face of popular horror, whether you liked it or not. "I remember seeing the first teaser, the NSFW teaser," Dunstan tells us. "I was working at Disney Family Fun, so I plugged in the headset on my lunch hour, and saw Amanda in the reverse bear trap – holy cow! 'I gotta see that movie.'"

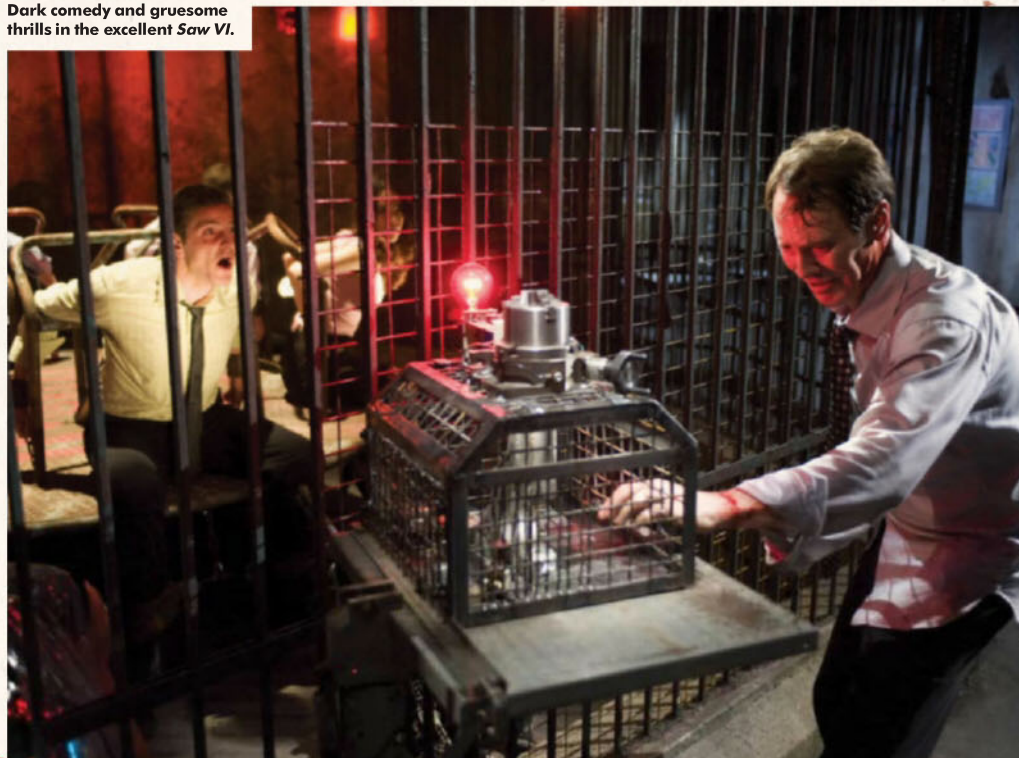
"It was just something you'd never seen before," concludes Melton. "It was just fucking crazy right?"

Saw: The Complete Collection is available to buy now on DVD and Blu-ray, distributed by Lionsgate Home Entertainment.



It turns out that a pound of flesh is a lot more than it sounds.

Dark comedy and gruesome thrills in the excellent *Saw VI*.



THERE WILL BE BLOOD

Saw's bloody good advertising campaigns

How do you promote one of the most successful horror franchises of all time? Well, to some extent, the films marketed themselves. The famous brag line 'if it's Halloween, it must be *Saw*' used on posters from *Saw IV* onwards was brilliant in its simplicity, both pointing out that there was a new *Saw* film rolling into cinemas every Halloween and making it sound like seeing it was non-optional. But beyond stark, gory posters, the *Saw* promotional machine actually churned out some pretty creative stunts.

Firstly, there was the *Saw Blood Drive*. Launched in 2004, the Blood Drive became an annual tradition, as Lionsgate teamed up with the American Red Cross to encourage fans to "give til it hurts". Smart and thematically appropriate, the Blood Drive also gave fans something to throw in the faces of concerned *Saw* haters. After all, how damaging can a horror franchise be when it's actively working to save lives and helping with a continuing international problem.

The blood theme continued into the marketing for *Saw III*, when Tim Palen, head of marketing at Lionsgate, commissioned some very special posters. The limited edition prints featured Jigsaw wearing a red cloak – and the red ink contained actor Tobin Bell's blood. The posters were sold for \$20 each, with all proceeds donated to the Red Cross. A little morbid perhaps, but it worked.

More frivolously, in 2009 the world's first horror-themed rollercoaster opened in the form of *Saw The Ride* at Thorpe Park. Engineered to be especially scary, the ride features 'blood' sprays, swinging blades, and a 'beyond vertical' backwards drop. The ride was popular enough that in 2010 Thorpe Park added the *Saw Alive* maze, featuring scenes from the movies. The pre-publicity for the maze focused, for once, on a different bodily fluid: *Saw* fans were asked to contribute samples of particularly bad-smelling urine to enhance the maze's atmosphere, crossing the border into disgusting.



IT HAS BEEN OVER TWO DECADES SINCE ITS RELEASE, BUT THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS REMAINS A FESTIVE MUST-WATCH FOR ALL THE FAMILY, AND ONLY GETS BETTER WITH AGE. SCIFINOW TAKES A LOOK AT WHAT HAS MADE IT SUCH A CULT HOLIDAY HIT...

WORDS POPPY-JAY PALMER

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS



Film

RUNNING TIME:

76 mins

RELEASE DATE:

29 October 1993

DIRECTOR:

Henry Selick

WRITERS: Tim Burton,

Michael McDowell,

Caroline Thompson

CAST: Danny Elfman,

Chris Sarandon, Catherine

O'Hara, William Hickey,

Ken Page, Glenn Shadix,

Paul Reubens

About

The people of Halloween Town have been preparing for their big holiday all year, but Jack Skellington the Pumpkin King, the event organiser, has grown tired of the same old thing. While wandering through the forest, he comes across a mysterious portal and is accidentally transported to Christmas Town. Suddenly, Jack is confronted with snow, decorations and festivity, and he loves it. He rushes back home to inform the town's residents what he has found, and decides that they should host their own Christmas. But between the Oogie Boogie Man and kidnapping Santa, things start to go awry...

On the completion of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*, Walt Disney Studios decided to release it under their Touchstone Pictures banner. They didn't have much faith in the film, and feared it would be a bit too scary and dark for Disney's regular, younger audience. Due to this, the film only went out on two screens on its opening weekend, somewhat stunting its takings.

More than two decades later, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* is bigger than it has ever been. Most film fans have seen it, and those who haven't have it on their watch list. Contrary to the title, it's as much as a must-watch for Halloween as it is for Christmas. The need to see it twice a year over a two-month period gives Disney the opportunity to re-release the film every few years, most recently on Blu-ray and in Disney Digital 3D – to the point where most people have more than one copy at the back of their DVD cabinets.

Adding to its ever-increasing pot of gold from DVD sales, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* continues to be a commercial success thanks to the amount of tie-in merchandise you can buy. It's next to impossible to go through a full week without spotting Jack Skellington's face on someone's bag at the bus stop or on an advent calendar in Tesco. The number of *Nightmare*-related things currently for sale is astounding. It came out 21 years ago, but you can still buy Jack Skellington slippers, dressing gowns, baby grows, dummy clips, umbrellas, raincoats and beachwear, steering wheel covers and pencil toppers, not to mention *Oogie Boogie Operation*, *Nightmare Yahtzee* and *Monopoly*. Whatever you want – wine glasses, oven gloves, anything – it's probably available somewhere on eBay.

"BURTON INJECTED HIS TRADEMARK IMAGINATION"

The reason for all this: it's a great film. The stop motion, Christmas and Halloween elements disguise it as a pretty niche movie at a glance, but overall it's been universally accepted as a doozy.

Although Henry Selick directed the film, it is still remembered as being Tim Burton's project, not least because it's often promoted as 'Tim Burton's *The Nightmare Before Christmas*', with his name appearing at the top of most of its posters. In fairness, the only reason Burton didn't direct the project was because of his commitments on *Batman Returns* and *Ed Wood*. Instead, he acted as co-writer and producer, and injected his trademark imagination into the film.

The Nightmare Before Christmas is one of a surprisingly large number of movies

that are based on poems. The rhyme in question was actually written by Burton himself. Three pages long, it was more or less the same story you see play out in the film, but obviously with less detail, fewer characters and no songs.

During the writing process, Burton drew inspiration from television specials of *How The Grinch Stole Christmas* and *Rudolph The Red-Nosed Reindeer*, and Clement Clarke Moore's poem *A Visit From St Nicholas*. Moore's poem is also famously known as 'Twas The Night Before Christmas, a phrase that is parodied in *The Nightmare Before Christmas*'s title.

The partnership of Tim Burton and composer Danny Elfman contributed to *The Nightmare Before Christmas*'s success as a cult hit in a big way. Elfman's ➤



Sally helps Jack through his Christmas obsession.

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

RETRO CLASSIC

CLASSIC QUOTES

"I AM THE PUMPKIN KING!"
JACK SKELLINGTON

**"HAVEN'T YOU HEARD
OF GOODWILL AND
PEACE TO ALL MEN?"**
SANTA

**"THERE'S CHILDREN THROWING
SNOWBALLS INSTEAD OF
THROWING HEADS! THEY'RE BUST
BUILDING TOYS AND ABSOLUTELY
NO ONE'S DEAD!"**
JACK SKELLINGTON

**"HOW HORRIBLE OUR
CHRISTMAS WILL BE!"**
MAYOR

**"I'VE GOT TO KNOW WHAT IS THIS PLACE
THAT I HAVE FOUND? WHAT IS THIS?
CHRISTMAS TOWN..."**
JACK SKELLINGTON

**"ON A DARK COLD
NIGHT, UNDER FULL
MOONLIGHT, HE FLIES
INTO THE FOG LIKE A
VULTURE IN THE SKY!
AND THEY CALL HIM...
SANDY... CLAWS..."**
JACK SKELLINGTON

**"FORGIVE ME, MR CLAUS. I'M AFRAID I'VE
MADE A TERRIBLE MESS OF YOUR HOLIDAY"**
JACK SKELLINGTON

"BUNNY!"
BEHEMOTH

**"I AM THE CLOWN WITH THE TEAR-
AWAY FACE! HERE IN A FLASH AND
GONE WITHOUT A TRACE!"**
CLOWN

**"JUST BECAUSE I CANNOT SEE IT DOESN'T
MEAN I CAN'T BELIEVE IT!"**
JACK SKELLINGTON

"I HAD THE MOST TERRIBLE VISION"
SALLY

Christmas is upturned when the Sandy Claws is kidnapped.



➤ eccentric musical style went perfectly with the whirls and swirls of Burton's twisted imagination. The pair have developed a strong creative relationship over the years, which has resulted in Elfman scoring all but two of Burton's films (*Ed Wood* and *Sweeney Todd*). Burton has said of their relationship: "We don't even have to talk about the music. We don't even have to intellectualise – which is good for both of us, we're both similar that way. We're very lucky to connect."

The musical sequences make up most of the highlights of the film. The song Jack sings upon first discovering Christmas Town, *What's This?*, is upbeat and festive, with catchy lyrics and jingle bells throughout, and is difficult to get out of your head after hearing it. In contrast, *This Is Halloween* perfectly captures everything Halloween Town represents. The minor key and clay creatures that sweep across the screen to the pounding beat – disappearing faster than they

arrive – make the number creepy and quite disturbing. Elfman has since said that writing the songs for the film was one of the easiest jobs he has ever had, as he feels he has a lot in common with Jack Skellington.

As far as music is concerned, Elfman did much more than write the film's score and ten songs; he also provided Jack Skellington's singing voice. Chris Sarandon was later cast as Jack because his speaking voice matched Elfman's singing perfectly.

The film's soundtrack was nominated for a Golden Globe for Best Original Score in 1993, and like the film has since been re-issued numerous times. A special edition was released with the Disney Digital 3D version in 2006. It included covers of the film's songs by Fall Out Boy, Panic! At The Disco, Marilyn Manson, Fiona Apple and She Wants Revenge. In 2008, Disney re-released the soundtrack yet again, this time featuring cover versions by the likes of Plain White T's, The All-American Rejects, Amy Lee, Flyleaf, Korn and Rise Against.

"IT HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A TOUR DE FORCE"



Jack tries his hand at delivering presents.

The Mayor of Halloween Town doesn't share Jack's love for Christmas.



FILLED WITH CHEER

The top 5 creepy Christmas films you need to see

RARE EXPORTS (2010)



1 In the snowy Finnish hills, a Christmas miracle is unearthed: a Santa who kills reindeer and punishes naughty children. "He sees you when you're sleeping... He knows if you're awake..." just got a hell of a lot more creepy.

GREMLINS (1984)



2 Dear Santa, we have been very well behaved his year, and for Christmas we'd like a cute and cuddly friend who turns multiples when he gets wet and turns evil and runs amok when we feed him after midnight. Love, SciFiNow.

BATMAN RETURNS (1992)



3 One word: Penguin. With his flipper hands, beak nose and general beingness, you wouldn't put Oswald Cobblepot atop your Christmas cake. As for the penguins, just maybe.

THE NIGHTMARE BEFORE CHRISTMAS

RETRO CLASSIC

After the music came the long and arduous animation process. A 120 person-strong team worked on the film, which took three years to complete. Every second consisted of around 12 stop-motion moves, and by the time production had wrapped, a staggering 109,440 frames had been taken. They drew inspiration from stop-motion animation giants Ray Harryhausen and Ladislav Starevich and artists Edward Gorey, Charles Addams, Jan Lenica, Francis Bacon and Wassily Kandinsky.



Constructing puppets from the designs was as difficult a task as bringing them to life. Around 230 puppets were made to accommodate the many characters that appear in the film, including all the big players like Jack, Sally (Catherine O'Hara), Oogie Boogie (Ken Page) and the evil scientist Doctor Finklestein (William Hickey), as well as the minor characters, like the Grim Reaper, the Wolfman, the Clown With The Tear-Away Face and the residents of Halloween Town, and the elves, penguins and reindeer that Jack encounters in Christmas Town.



In addition to moving Jack's spindly arms and legs a couple of centimetres for each frame, the animators also had his face to deal with. His entire head had to be switched out for each facial expression, resulting in the construction of over 400 heads to create every possible expression.

Though Burton's style has bled through the foundations of the entire film, the base style noticeably changes with each setting. Selick explained the thinking behind it in the commentary on the 2000 special edition DVD. "When we reach Halloween Town, it's entirely German Expressionism," he says. "When Jack enters Christmas Town, it's an outrageous Dr Seuss-esque set piece. Finally, when Jack is delivering presents in the 'Real World', everything is plain, simple and perfectly aligned."

The Nightmare Before Christmas almost made a return to cinemas when Walt Disney Studios started throwing around ideas for a sequel. But rather than using stop-motion to resurrect the characters, they wanted to use computer animation. Burton was not in favour of the idea, and eventually managed to convince them to drop it. He said: "I was always very protective of it not to do sequels or things of that kind. You know, 'Jack visits Thanksgiving world' or other kinds of things just because I felt the movie had a purity to it and the people that like it."

Since its tepid release in 1993, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* has become something of a tour de force. The road to icon status started out a bumpy one, but it has persisted and aged very well. Not everyone may know Jack Skellington's name, but they know his face, his pinstriped suit and his bat bowtie. They know Oogie Boogie the bogeyman and the patched-up rag doll Sally, and they've seen the bright yellow moon behind the swirling hill overlooking the pumpkin patch of Halloween Town. Every year, from 31 October to 25 December, Jack Skellington rules again as the Pumpkin King.



The Nightmare Before Christmas is out now on DVD, Blu-ray and Blu-ray 3D.



The Pumpkin King and his queen duet in the moonlight.

WATCH FIRST



WHO FRAMED ROGER RABBIT? (1988)

The film was a reference for what Disney wanted from *Nightmare's* technical and storytelling capabilities.

WATCH NEXT

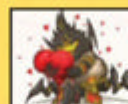


CORPSE BRIDE (2005)

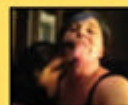
Tim Burton's next venture into stop-motion animation is just as dark and just as musical, with added Depp.

YOUR TAKE ON THE CLASSIC

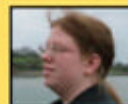
WHAT YOU THOUGHT @SCIFINOW



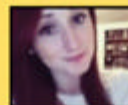
"It's the business. Time Burton wishes he could still Tim Burton like he did in *Nightmare*." @AshAbuse



"Best. Holiday movie. EVER!" @MsCrisis



"Best movie. BEST movie. (Other than all the other best movies, of course. But I do love it.)" @yoritomo_reiko



"My favourite ever film! I watch it all year round I love it that much." @ToniMarie1991



Fabulous film. Love it to bits." @TheCrowLady



"Best. Movie. Ever. Oh... but *Aliens*... and *Galaxy Quest*... and... hmm... it's a really good movie!" @grimorde



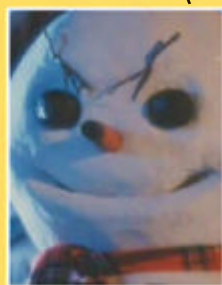
"Looked at it last night on the Disney Channel! It was as good as ever." @marywards

THE GRINCH (2000)



4 His heart may grow two sizes too big, but the Grinch is pretty creepy before he finds the true meaning of Christmas. The flashbacks to his childhood are the stuff of nightmares. You're a mean one, Mr Grinch.

JACK FROST (1997)



5 Not the heart-warming festive family film starring Michael Keaton; the other, creepier one from 1997. Jack was nimble. Jack was quick. Jack gouged eyes with candlesticks. Just look at his creepy face!



JOHN CARPENTER'S

THE
THING

FLASHBACK

JOHN CARPENTER'S THE THING

ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVELY UNSETTLING SCI-FI/HORROR FILMS OF ALL TIME, THE THING DIED A BOX-OFFICE DEATH UPON ITS RELEASE IN 1982, THANKS IN PART TO A FILM FEATURING A CERTAIN ALIEN WHO WANTED TO PHONE HOME. WE TALK TO JOHN CARPENTER ABOUT HOW HIS SHAPE-SHIFTING SHOCKER EVOLVED INTO ITS OWN TERRIFYING BEAST TO BECOME A DEFINITIVE EIGHTIES CULT CLASSIC...

WORDS OLIVER PFEIFFER

"You gotta be fucking kidding!" Perhaps no line spoken in movie history has so perfectly summed up the mutual reaction of both the characters' and the audience's jaw-dropping bewilderment than that appropriate zinger from John Carpenter's masterpiece *The Thing*. But in retrospect, the remark could just have easily expressed the sentiment of the director when he was originally approached to re-make Howard Hawks' seminal 1951 sci-fi horror classic *The Thing From Another World*.

"I wasn't very interested initially, as I loved the original, and thought it was one of the great jump-out-of-your-seat-popcorn-flying movies, so I didn't really

want to touch it," reflects Carpenter, a self-confessed Hawks aficionado. "It was my friend [co-producer] Stuart Cohen who then suggested that we forget the original movie and just completely reinvent it by going back to the novella. I thought, 'That's not a bad idea!'"

Constricted by the crude practical aesthetics of the time, the original Fifties film featured a towering man-in-a-monster-suit (TV series *Gunsmoke* actor James Arness) as the bloodthirsty titular vegetable-based humanoid who infiltrates an isolated Antarctica research station. However, in John W Campbell's 1938 source novel *Who Goes There?* the researchers come into contact with the far more unpredictable prospect of an interchangeable creature who can perfectly

imitate any of them. "There was a passing glance to the [shape-shifting origins] in the original film," Carpenter acknowledges. "Near the end of the movie when the scientists are making their last stand, one of the soldiers says, 'I just had this thought – what if he can read my mind?' But that was the closest they came to it."

Consequently, Carpenter would completely run with Campbell's 'who can you trust?' mystery concept, and the idea of an enigmatic, shape-shifting creature would be realised thanks to the vivid imagination of a 22-year-old special make-up effects wiz named Rob Bottin, who had previously impressed with his startling lycanthrope transformations for Joe Dante's *The Howling*. "He gave me one of the clues to do the movie when he said, '*The Thing* can look like anything because it has imitated all these life-forms, so it doesn't have to be one creature,'" recalls Carpenter. "And I thought, 'Well, that's really new, we haven't seen that before, and we can do some really crazy things', so that's where we started."

"I THOUGHT, 'WELL, THAT'S REALLY NEW, WE HAVEN'T SEEN THAT BEFORE, AND WE CAN DO SOME REALLY CRAZY THINGS'" JOHN CARPENTER



Carpenter reunited with long-time colleague Kurt Russell for *The Thing*.

The British Columbia shoot proved to be a gruelling one for all concerned.



Key to the unnerving conviction of Campbell's story was the overwhelming sense of psychological paranoia and entrapment among characters confined within a tight physical space where a monster lurks. But unlike Carpenter's previous films, which predominately featured strong female roles, the director was attracted to the intriguing prospect of an entirely male-dominated movie. The original intention was to have an ensemble piece with 12 characters of equal footing. However, when Kurt Russell came on board to play pilot and eventual leader RJ MacReady, that dynamic altered.

"At first I wasn't sure. I kind of wanted to work with someone else just for variation," says Carpenter, who had just finished working with Russell in *Escape From*

➤ New York. "The studio, however, loved him, and he chose to play it very realistically, which I loved, so I was really happy."

Apart from the roll call of recognisable character actors that included Wilford Brimley, Keith David and Donald Moffat, another distinguishable performer was that of an Alaskan Malamute, which is seen being chased by a helicopter piloted by trigger-happy Norwegians at the beginning of the film. The enigma behind the pursuit is momentarily kept blurred, although hints toward the canine's true identity lurk within its subsequent voyeuristic behaviour, particularly when it creeps quietly down a corridor inside the research station, pausing to glance through several doorways to survey the scene.

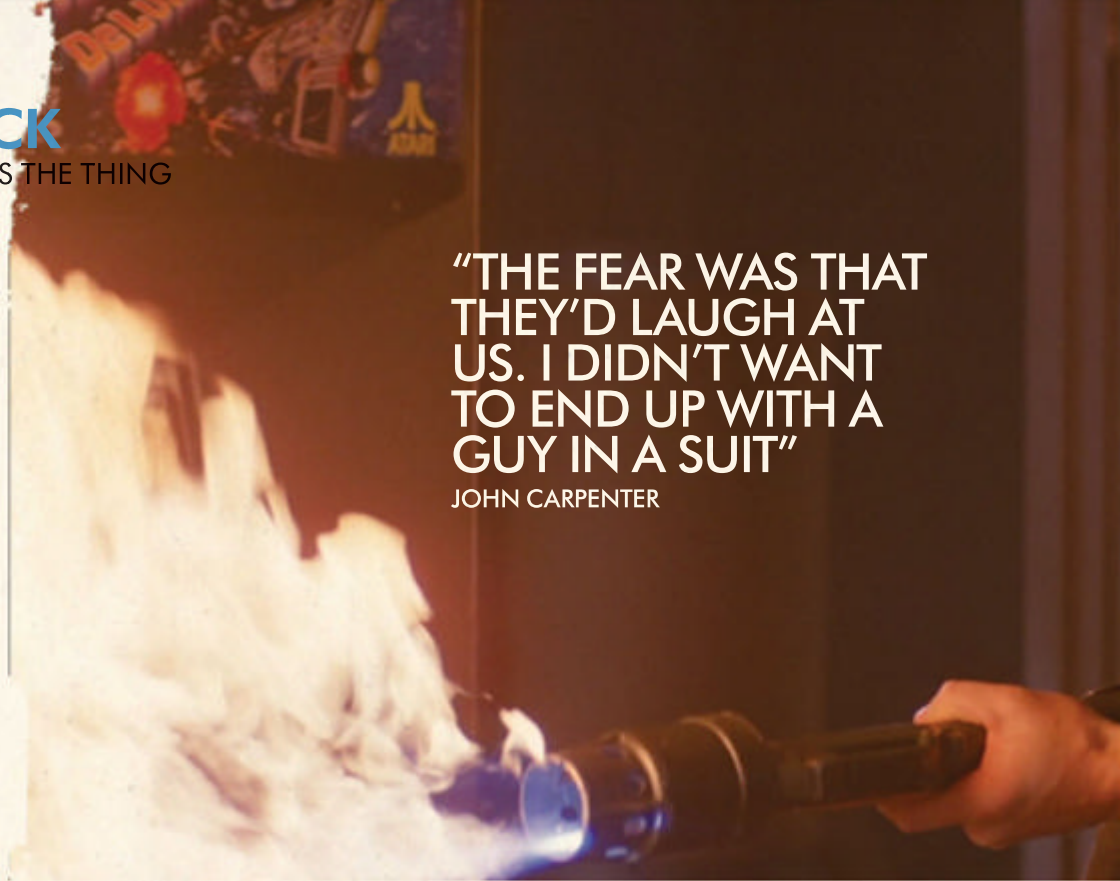
"He was great," nods Carpenter. "He was part wolf [and part husky], which is the reason he had high intelligence, and that scene was remarkable for an animal, because the camera was right in front of him and he didn't bat an eye; he just followed his marks." Although it was the late physical effects maestro Stan Winston who would realise the terrifyingly tentacled alien origin of the four-legged creature via impressive puppetry techniques, *The Thing* would ultimately remain Bottin's baby, with the young FX wiz and his 40-strong team creating some of the most grotesque prosthetic xenomorphic concoctions of all time.



"The fear was that they'd laugh at us. I didn't want to end up with a guy in a suit like I'd seen in countless Fifties science fiction films when I was a kid," says Carpenter. The director needn't have worried. Take the notorious sequence where a man administers CPR on his colleague, only for his arms to be suddenly severed by teeth formulating from within the victim's chest, leading to the infamous segment where the imitated head tears from the body, falls to the floor, sprouts legs and scurries off – and then that legendary zinger. "[Original scribe] Bill Lancaster came up with the line, 'You gotta be fucking kidding!' in the middle of shooting after we started describing what this creature was going to look like," attributes Carpenter. "It worked out great – it was the perfect moment of humour in an otherwise grotesquely horrible scene."

But *The Thing* is also remarkable for its nail-biting suspense. One of the great edge-of-your-seat sequences remains its pivotal blood test scene, where MacReady determines the authenticity of his team by subjecting samples of their blood to a heated piece of copper wire. "I loved filming it – it was one of my favourite scenes in the movie," considers Carpenter. "Once I figured what this blood test scene was going to be about, I knew I had a movie I could work with, and that was the secret for me. It took four days to shoot, but everybody was really into the scene, so it couldn't have gone better. It was really fun to do."

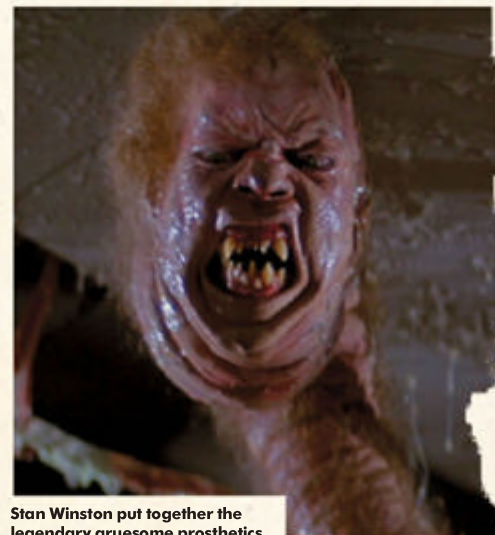
Less fun was the British Columbian location shoot, where cast and crew were subjected to sub-freezing winter conditions. Nevertheless, the uncomfortable climate lent itself its own sense of realism, helping to build a bond between cast members and giving authenticity to characters cut off from the world in such close proximity to one another for an elongated period of time.



"THE FEAR WAS THAT THEY'D LAUGH AT US. I DIDN'T WANT TO END UP WITH A GUY IN A SUIT"

JOHN CARPENTER

Russell puts in one of his defining performances as RJ MacReady.



Stan Winston put together the legendary gruesome prosthetics.

Giving punctuation to all the bleakness on screen was legendary composer Ennio Morricone's score. Unusually for Carpenter, this would mark the first time in the filmmaker's career where he didn't write the music for his own film. "Nobody wanted me to compose the score, so I wasn't asked. That was fine with me, so I chose Morricone," says the filmmaker, who was such an admirer of the master's work that he marched down the aisle to a Morricone theme on his wedding day.

Interestingly, the pulsating electronic beats that accompany the opening credit sequence and subsequent helicopter dog pursuit evoke the low-key menacing simplicity of archetypal Carpenter scores to such a degree you'd swear it was created by the filmmaker himself. But the director claims that apart from some bridging work the Italian maestro, renowned for his iconic collaborations with Sergio Leone, was responsible for composing the entire score. "There are two basic parts to his score. One was that opening theme, which is a very simple electronic piece, then the second part, was some very heavy-duty orchestral pieces, which are just beautiful."

Renowned for his bleak, nihilistic endings, *The Thing* (considered by some to be the first part of Carpenter's unofficial 'Apocalypse trilogy' that continues with *Prince Of Darkness* and concludes with *In The Mouth Of Madness*) is certainly no exception. It has one of the grimmest conclusions in the filmmaker's entire oeuvre, where the two surviving characters MacReady and Childs (Keith David) sit and wait for their inevitable demise, neither of them sure whether the other is otherworldly. "I describe myself as a short-term pessimist but a long-term optimist," claims the director.

Despite the poignant denouement, rumours of an alternative ending filmed as a safety measure have surfaced since the film's release. Carpenter says that no other ending exists – however, he does admit to shooting an additional shot. "I got a little worried that we would be accused of having a 'what happened?' -type scenario, so I took a shot of MacReady sitting in safety, but it was just a shot," he assures. "It would have been a terrible, horrible way to end the movie. It was just a moment of insecurity."

But perhaps because of this bold finale, audiences and critics didn't take to *The Thing*, and the film was

JOHN CARPENTER'S THE THING

FLASHBACK



BETTER LEFT UNSAID

FIVE THINGS YOU PROBABLY DIDN'T KNOW ABOUT THE THING

1 FEMALE TOUCH

While *The Thing* remains a completely male-dominated movie, actress Adrienne Barbeau, who was then John Carpenter's wife, lent a female touch by providing the vocals of MacReady's chess playing computer. A scene featuring a blow-up sex doll was also filmed, but never made it into the movie. "It was a stupid scene that didn't go anywhere, so we just dropped it," confirms Carpenter.



2 DOUBLE TAKE

For the notorious resuscitation scene where the toothy alien chest severs Dr Cooper's arms, a real-life amputee stood in, donning a mask that resembled actor Richard Dysart.



3 SEQUEL STORY

Carpenter has considered filming a sequel. One story would centre on the rescue of the two surviving characters due to a signal being successfully transmitted from the research station before its subsequent destruction. Carpenter now claims he would have followed the Dark Horse Comics' stories. One of these follows soul survivor MacReady as he pursues the creature to New Zealand, while in another subtitled *Questionable Research* it is revealed that while MacReady is human, second survivor Childs is indeed an alien. A prequel eventually surfaced in 2011, to a largely negative critical reception.



4 COWBOY CASTING

Clint Eastwood was at one time considered for the role of MacReady. Following the casting of Lee Van Cleef in *Escape From New York* and working with composer Ennio Morricone on *The Thing*, it would have made an apt continuation of Carpenter collaborating with renowned director Sergio Leone's associates.



5 THE X-FILES HOMAGE

The eighth episode of the first season of *The X-Files* is a direct homage to *The Thing*. It concerns Mulder and Scully's investigation into the deaths of an isolated Alaskan research team who have come into contact with an extraterrestrial parasite that has infiltrated their bodies. Akin to the film, they become unsure whether they can trust each other. Graeme Murray, who worked as a set decorator on *The Thing*, was hired to create the confined set where events take place.



One of Carpenter's bleakest films, it's considered part of his unofficial 'Apocalypse' trilogy.



At the time, *The Thing* wasn't the mega-hit they'd hoped for.



An additional ending scene was shot, but never used.

targeted for both its bleak outlook and the abstract excessiveness of its special effects. "Even the fans were in uproar," says Carpenter. "Why people didn't like that film when it was released is beyond me! But in retrospect it was a big-time downer about the end of the world, so it worked out to be a pretty grim story."

Bad timing arguably contributed too, with the film released just two weeks after Spielberg's instant success story *ET: The Extraterrestrial*. Perhaps audiences were more comfortable with a compassionate alien than a menacing one who could take over your entire being. Sensibilities evolve, however, and *The Thing* found its audience on home video and became a cult classic that is largely considered superior to the original Hawks film.

"*The Thing* is about the ultimate end of mankind and the end of things. It's also about these levels of trust in humanity, and that's what the movie really focuses on," reflects Carpenter. "What happens when you can no longer trust? What happens if you know your friends and your comrades, but you don't know if they're human or not? That's the essence of the movie: loved ones who attack you. *The Thing* has a lot of truth in it – dressed up as a monster movie."



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THE NORTH POLE

1. What makes up the elves' four main food groups?
2. How did Baby Buddy originally end up at the North Pole?
3. How old was Papa Elf when he made Master Tinker at the elves' workshop?
4. What used to power Santa's sleigh before the Kringle 3000 jet engine?
5. How many levels of the Candy Cane Forest did Buddy travel through to get to New York?

HAPPY FAMILIES

6. Once in New York, where does Buddy go to find his father?

7. What does Buddy smother with syrup at his first family dinner?
8. Which science fiction film franchise did Emily Hobbs (actress Mary Steenburgen) appear in?
9. What does Buddy write a note to his father on before running away?
10. What is the name of Buddy's 12-year-old human half-brother?

FAIRY TALE OF NEW YORK

11. What is the name of the department store where Jovie works?
12. What does Buddy do with the cotton balls at the doctor's surgery?
13. Where in New York does Santa crash his sleigh?

14. What is the name of Walter's pleasant secretary?
15. Which *Game Of Thrones* star appears as hot-headed children's writer Miles Finch?

UNDER THE MISTLETOE

16. What song do Jovie and Buddy duet to while Jovie is showering?
17. Where are Buddy and Jovie when they share their first kiss?
18. Who do Buddy and Jovie name their daughter Susie after?
19. What does Jovie sing on television to spread Christmas cheer?
20. What does Buddy get Jovie to drink blindfolded on the first stop of their date?

DIDN'T HE/SHE DO WELL! See how you did with our arbitrary scoring system

16-20

BUDDY

The only person more Christmassy than you is baby Jesus himself. There's nothing you love more than making people smile, singing festive songs and spreading Christmas cheer.

11-15

SANTA

You may be the expert on all things Christmas, but the festive season is a very stressful time for you. All you need to make your Christmas magical is the people around you feeling the magic too.

6-10

JOVIE

Sometimes it's a struggle belting out Christmas songs at the top of your lungs, but between ice-skating, costumes and Christmas trees, it doesn't take long for you to get into the spirit.

0-5

WALTER

You not only don't care for the festive period; you actively despise it. But you'll soon be singing along with the rest of them. The Christmas spirit comes for everyone in the end.

ANSWERS: 1. CANDY, CANDY CANES, CANDY CORNS AND SYRUP 2. HE CRAWLS INTO SANTA'S SACK 3. 490 4. CHRISTMAS SPIRIT 5. SEVEN 6. THE EMPIRE STATE BUILDING 7. SPAGHETTI 8. BACK TO THE FUTURE 9. AN ETC-A-SKETCH 10. MICHAEL HOBBS 11. GIMBELS 12. HE EATS THEM 13. CENTRAL PARK 14. DEBORAH OR DEB 15. PETER DINKLAGE 16. BABY, IT'S COLD OUTSIDE 17. ON AN ICE RINK 18. BUDDY'S MOTHER, SUSAN WELLS 19. SANTA CLAUSE IS COMING TO TOWN 20. THE WORLD'S BEST CUP OF COFFEE

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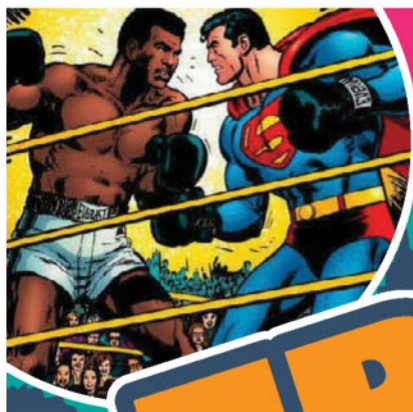
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